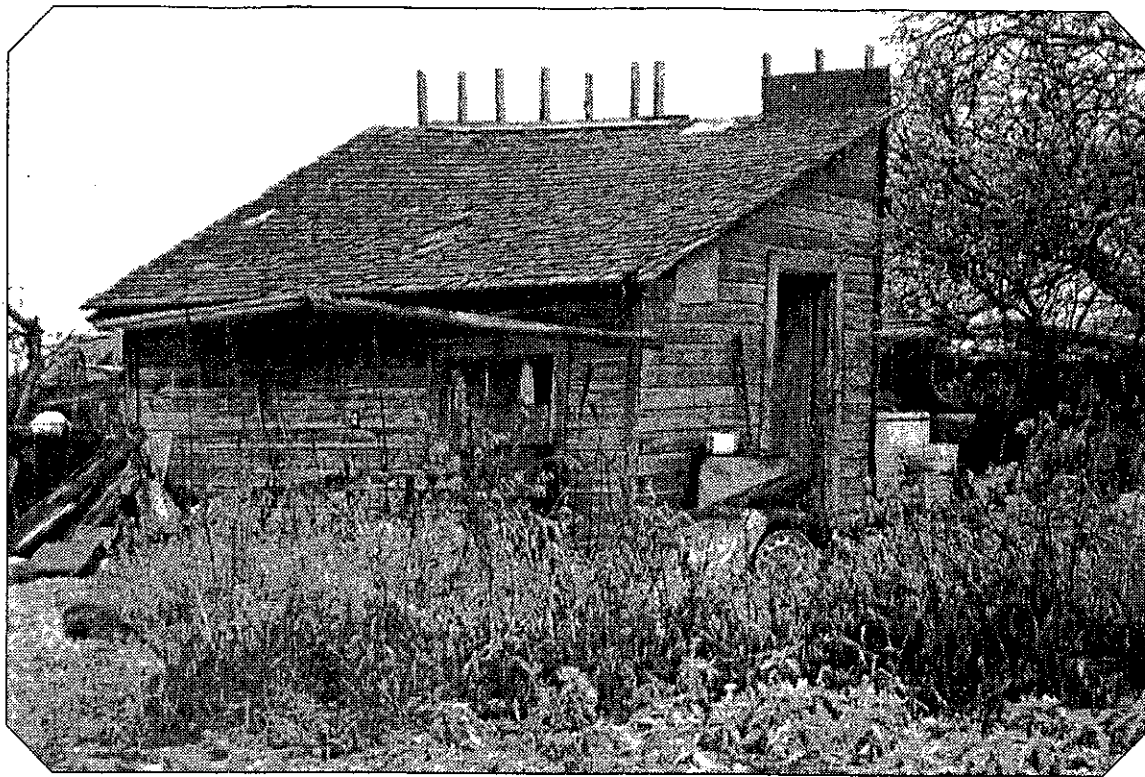


my first and second passing. This time I stopped and studied the seemingly abandoned shelter. Without a doubt, it had never seen a coat of paint. The eave-trough along the front was pinned in the centre and hanging down on both ends. The door on the attached lean-to was ajar and a single hinge at the top held it from dropping off. I drove closer. The weeds around the door were trampled down. Could someone still be living in this hovel? The out-door comfort station's door was also ajar and a path was worn to its entrance. The pump was barely visible in the dense growth at the rear of the scruffy, junk strewn yard - obviously no plumbing in the house. There was sufficient evidence that someone was still inhabiting this dilapidated blemish in the community. By city standards it should long have been condemned and demolished.

I turned the car into the yard and stopped beside the door. Why not make a pastoral call? The door on the lean-to hung askew several feet. The weeds reached higher than the hood of the car. How could anyone crawl into this dump and call it "home?" I sat and surveyed the trodden approach to the premise. It was the depiction of squalor and a depressed existence. A sizable pool had collected inside the shed, but with a little jump, I landed on the narrow step leading into the dwelling, and knocked. No answer! Surely it was abandoned and willed to the rats for their final resting place. I knocked again, and a crusty male voice with obvious disdain for a visitor, shouted, "Come in." I turned the knob and pushed. No luck! Moisture had swollen the door, but after I had applied my shoulder several times, it burst open.

I stepped in and was greeted by the most repulsive and obnoxious odour ever encountered.



I knocked again, and a crusty male voice with obvious disdain for a visitor, shouted, "Come in." ... I stepped in and was greeted by the most repulsive and obnoxious odour ever encountered. A lung-full made me want to succumb to nausea and retch.

A lung-full made me want to succumb to nausea and retch. The aroma of the single room was sufficiently potent to anaesthetize a patient for surgery. I fought the temptation to gag. One quick glance showed a kitchen counter loaded high with unwashed pots and pans, and a fry pan which had a two inch depth to it, had stale crud

to almost half its depth. On the far side of the room was the bed. The mattress had no sheet on it, and its user had obviously lost control of body-functions occasionally. It reminded me of mattresses I had seen under loading docks and bridges in the core area of the city of Winnipeg. A five gallon pail without a lid, served as an indoor portable. The accumulation of debris and garbage left little walking space around the bed, and indeed throughout the room. The floor boards were carpeted with the drippings of carelessly opened soups and beers, and much more. Empty bottles lay littered everywhere.

The old man sat at the table drinking a beer and smoking, and it was obvious he was not about to start a conversation. I pulled the only other chair toward the table. I winced when I touched the back of the chair. It was made of chrome-plated tubing but was now plated heavily with unidentifiable pasty filth; it felt like the bark of an oak tree. The vinyl seat-covering was worn through, and the batting with which it had been upholstered, hung down on all sides like icicles. I sat down beside him, careful not to rest my elbows on the grubby tabletop. It had more dried food plastered to it than a baby in a high chair after enjoying its very first slice of jam on bread.

"Good morning to you." I spoke as cheerfully as I could. It was no easy task to muster up sufficient courage to display a happy and joyful attitude. He made no reply.

"You don't make a fellow feel very welcome," I continued after a pause. "I came all the way from Winnipeg to visit you, and you don't even say 'Welcome!' How about it, can we become friends?" His seemingly sullen attitude permitted no

immediate response. I waited patiently. Perhaps several minutes passed before he responded. I just sat and looked out the dirty window in front of us. The ash tray on the table was spilling over with a mound of cigarette butts. He slowly reached out and picked up one of the three cups that were on the table. They had not been washed after many uses. Coffee sediment was encrusted on the bottoms, and the outside had dried on tobacco juice, stuccoed there by tobacco dripping lips. With two fingers, which I dare say hadn't been washed for untold months, he scraped the bottom of one cup and wiped the contents on his shirt which was already saturated with unimaginable filth of every kind and colour. He then generously poured a few inches of beer from the bottle he was drinking into the cup, slid the cup over to me, and said, "Welcome!"

I profusely thanked him for his hospitable gesture, hoping he would not notice that I was not partaking of this genial offer of friendship.

"So, what is it you want?" He finally spoke. I was surprised. He spoke politely and graciously, although every few words were punctuated with vulgar expletives. However, I felt that we had made progress. We were engaged in conversation.

With equal courtesy, I replied, "My Father sent me."

I now had alerted his attention. I perceived out of the corner of my eye, that he was giving me a thorough study.

"Your Father? Do I know Him?"

"No, I'm afraid you don't! He told me to give you a message."

"Really, what kind of a message?"

"He told me to tell you, that He loved you so much, that He sent His only begotten Son to die for all your sins, so that you could be justified and prepared for the time when you would have to meet him face to face. His Son is called Jesus. Because we human beings are all sinful creatures and can't justify ourselves, He came and took all our sins in his own body and nailed them to the cross. He died the just for the unjust to reconcile us to Himself. And all those who believe in Him,

He gives everlasting life, and those that refuse to accept Him as their Saviour, perish everlastingly."

I paused a moment letting the words sink in, than asked, "Will you accept this message?"

Did Jesus not say to His body of believers, "Go into the highways and byways and invite the lame, blind, poor, sick, and lost?"

I obviously caught him by surprise. He made no reply. The ashes on his cigarette grew longer and longer, then fell off. He didn't notice. Through the window, I now saw cars collecting at the church, and I knew it was time for me to be off.

He was not responding, so I continued, "There is another reason why I came in to see you this morning. Look out your window. See that church not even a block away? I have been invited to speak there this morning. How about being my guest. I'll leave my car here, and we'll walk over together. I would be so happy and exceedingly proud if you would come as my guest."

The fellow gave me a puzzled look of annoyance, astonishment and sheer disbelief. I could see he was more than surprised at the invitation. He was long in answering, and I was patient in waiting. Would he accept my invitation? I wondered! On second thought, perhaps the congregation would be more embarrassed than he, if he appeared with me. Would the person he should sit beside, get up and leave? Would he make the entire congregation uncomfortable? I'm sure he would, and perhaps even irritable, but what are churches in communities for? Did Jesus not say to His body of believers, "Go into the highways and byways and invite the lame, blind, poor, sick, and lost?" This fellow certainly met all those qualifications. He surely was "lost!" Would this church discriminate against this guy? Would the aroma that would accompany him

into the church, dispel the "fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved?"

I could see he was mulling it over. He sat motionless staring out the window, doubtlessly pondering a decision while looking at the church. He cleared his throat, inhaled long on a new cigarette, and finally spoke as in reflection, "You know, I have often thought of walking over there on a Sunday morning ...but not any more. Those guys wouldn't want anything to do with the likes of me. You know, I was here when they first built. I remember it very well. I also remember when they added on, but in all these years I've never gone." He paused in his reminiscing, then ever so slowly added, "nor have I ever gotten an invitation."

He spoke slowly and drawled out his words. "This is a small town and I know most of the guys who

Dear Reader

May the reading of this little experience encourage those who earnestly seek to serve the Saviour. He wonderfully restores and blesses. Perhaps you too can feel a tenderness for those hopelessly and helplessly enslaved, and who need some one with a heart of compassion to reach out to them. Every donation, large or small, will be accepted.

USE THIS TEAR-OFF TO FORWARD YOUR GIFT.

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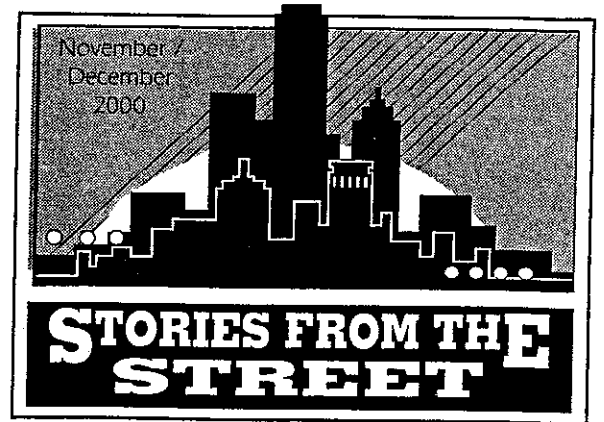
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go to that church. I see them around and sometimes we nod to each other. I once worked for one of them, but he never ever talked 'church' to me. When I worked for him, I got really sick. Man, was I sick! I thought I wasn't going to make it.

"This is a small town and I know most of the guys who go to that church... I once worked for one of them, but he never ever talked 'church' to me. When I worked for him, I got really sick... I thought I wasn't going to make it. What I wouldn't have given for someone to pop in!... As a matter-of-fact, no one came.

What I wouldn't have given for someone to pop in! I was sick for over a month, and he never once came to see why I wasn't showing up for work. As a matter-of-fact, no one came. And why should he, or anyone else? Why should anyone care about someone else? I never went back. For over forty years I've looked out of this window at that church Sunday mornings, wondering what they got going for them that's so special. They got something special I suppose, that's obvious from here, but anyway, I sure don't have whatever it is. I have to admit they're one happy bunch; sure friendly with each other. They never show up at the pub either. They keep to themselves, and why should I interfere and spoil their fun? I'll let them be and stay out of their way. No, I don't think you really want me to go with you. You go speak to them. You're more their kind. I'm sure they'll welcome you. You go give them the message your Father gave you to give me. They'll buy it, or maybe they've already heard such a message. Why would they want to hear it again? Anyway, thanks for asking, but no thanks."



Thanks for Asking, — but — **No Thanks**

The town seemed deserted. I had arrived at least a half-hour too early for the morning service, for only one car was parked at the church. Perhaps it would profit me to drive up and down the streets to feel the atmosphere of this community. Driving in, I had seen fields of cattle, large pig barns and flocks of sheep. The sparse fields of oats and barley, and a few of wheat, indicated that beef, pork and lamb were the main products. Occasionally a barren field showed large areas of very stony terrain.

The town consisted of only five or six short blocks. The general store, which by the placards pasted on the windows, sold groceries, shoes, hardware and school supplies. A sign on the bus depot read "Coffee's on." It was closed. What had obviously been a blacksmith shop in years gone by, was now a garage for a fire truck. The streets were empty and still only one car parked at the church.

After touring the town several times, my attention was focused on a shack within a block of the church where I was to speak. I had noticed it on