

The clergy discretionary fund is a fund that is a checking account fund of this church and is used by the clergy to help those who might request aid or need support or whatever reason the clergy deems appropriate. I get to use that account more than the other clergy and I consider it a great benefit of my position here to be entrusted with that privilege. The checkbook is not part of the general budget, although our bookkeepers, the counting sheep as they call themselves, know about the deposits made to the account by your contributions. Recently checks were written to help provide electricity to a family facing shut-off due to a complication with a car accident; another time a check was written to pay a prescription bill for someone without insurance. The discretionary fund purchases grocery store gift cards for a quick response to a hungry person or family. At times the fund has purchased clothing, brought bus tickets for emergency family visits and contributed to a psychiatric medical appointment for someone who needed the treatment drug methadone in order to stay clean and not return to the streets and their habit of living on meth. The discretionary fund is used wisely and meets the needs of people who walk into our doors seeking help or who have been screened by the downtown program, Helping Hands. Helping Hands calls me occasionally when they cannot meet the requests of the poor or needy and knows that perhaps Christ Church will step in.

On Thursday of this past week, the Helping Hands person contacted me via email with a request. A man, who was out of work due to a heart problem and resulting hospitalization, had returned to his work only to find out that the restaurant was closing and that he no longer had a job for more than one more week. He picked up his \$125 check for the few days he had worked in Dec and was desperate for help with his December rent. If it wasn't paid soon, he would be evicted. He had one more week to be cleared by his doctor to return to work, and he had something lined up for January, but he was caught in a bind: his health wouldn't let him search for work that could be done immediately to earn money for his December rent and he wouldn't be able to get unemployment or disability payments fast enough by this coming week to meet the rent. He had just renewed his lease, he was already there and what would he do?

Oh, he wasn't worried about himself. He was worried about his two children and his wife being evicted. You see, she didn't make enough money to pay the rent and the utilities and the groceries even though she worked full time. It was his work and his job that was responsible for the rent and he just couldn't make it this month with his heart attack.

So Christ Church was asked to contribute this one time towards his rent, if we were willing, to help Jesus find a roof over his head this Christmas season. Oops, wait a minute: Yes, I pronounced his name wrong. Jesus (hey-suz) and his family were facing eviction, but the image and question this whole situation left me with was the blessing his humbleness and his poverty added to my day: Would we, you and I, would Christ Church, help Jesus find a roof over his head this Christmas Season? Remember, this request came to me through an email and when I quickly read it I thought it literally asked if we were willing to help Jesus keep a place to live. Once I re-focused and reread it, I realized it was asking for aid for Hey-Suz.

"Who are you?" they asked John the Baptist, "Who are you?" Not satisfied with his confession and with his fulfilling of the old testament prophecy of Isaiah, John answered the temple authorities when he said that he was just preparing the way, making opportunity for the Messiah. John was sent from God, but he was not the Word, he was not the light, he was not the life of the world the gospels tell us. John was a witness to Jesus, the word of God. Three times in today's gospel alone, John is called a witness. John also told those temple authorities that Jesus stood among them as one they did not know. "Among you stand one whom you do not know."

John can be an example for all of us. We are all called to witness. Witnessing is most difficult, says Fred Craddock, "not because we do not believe but because we do. The more important the subject matter the harder it is to say the words. Speech stumbles over feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness; the words proceed cautiously to the listener's ear for fear of offending. Glib talkers who are 'really good at it' seldom persuade us that they have just come from [the darkness in life and from] the empty tomb. And the church corporately is called to witness,"

Witnessing is most difficult. But like John, we are supposed to let the world know that we are not the light, but we come to bear witness to the light. We come to bear witness to the light. The true Light is in the world, but among people he is often One they do not know. Some miss him perhaps because they have made looking for him a way of life. Or not looking for him a way of life. Craddock says that the first great task of a messiah is to bring to an end the search for a messiah. Too many miss him because they have not searched. And I wonder if we too can miss him. I wonder if we ever get lost in the whole confusion of faith and the search to find Jesus in our own lives, in looking for Jesus, or in figuring out how to look for Jesus, that often you and I do not recognize the One who stands among us, who is already here.

That is the Advent opportunity: to open our eyes and our hearts to be in the light, His light. To recognize the one who stands among us already even as we prepare to again celebrate his birth and humble beginnings; to give him shelter in our lives even as we recognize that he was born without a place to call home. To have an answer when the world asks "Who are you?" to each of us.

His home is now among us and within us. the God of change and challenge has broken through, acting in human form, in human lives, wanting something new to be happening.

Will you help Jesus find a roof over his head this Christmas Season? Will you help Jesus keep a place to live in the cold of this world? Will that be within you in a new way, a new place? Have you renewed your lease with God? Will your life and your actions witness to the Christ who already, ALREADY, stands among us? With you? When the world asks who you are, will it be able to know that you are a witness to Him? Will the checkbook of your heart open itself up to share the generosity of the deposit God has already put in it?

Oh so many advent questions. So many difficult questions. The answer to any of them is up to you. Christmas is coming soon and we prepare to receive a gift. My prayer is that you will know him a bit more, a bit differently and more deeply as the beloved Child of God you are. And may the world know that you do.

It is gift indeed. *Amen.*