

White Gift Drama for 2017

Pam Brown of Lively wrote a back page article for *The United Church Observer* that has inspired us in our White Gift presentation. Let us share with you the introduction of Pam's article to help set the context for this service. Pam writes:

Shaking my head, I grip the steering wheel tighter and whisper aloud: "What in the world did I get myself into?"

It was less than a week earlier – the last Sunday in June – when I stood up in church and said "I'll do it." Rev. Kathy Dahmer was preaching a sermon about connecting with people outside of our four walls. She spoke about being hospitable and as a church, we tend to assume it's about welcoming others *in* rather than considering how we are the church *out* in the world. During the sermon, she held up a cardboard sign – the kind of sign we might typically see in the hands of a person struggling with homelessness. At first glance, we expect to read the assumed words of begging, that the person holding the sign is in need. Yet this particular sign evoked something profoundly different. Etched with black marker, it read: "***I have a job, I have a home, I have a car, I have good health. Would YOU like \$ for a coffee?***"

I pictured holding the sign as I contemplated the word. Rev. Kathy began to ponder aloud: "I wonder what it would be like if someone took this sign downtown?" "I wonder what would happen if someone got some Toonies to give out?" "I wonder what it would be like...?" And so it began. I responded to the wondering, got out of my pew, retrieved the sign and said: "I'll do it."

The rest of the article outlines many of the significant connections that Pam made with people on the street as she held this sign, engaging people. At first reluctantly, and then tentatively, and later with some courage, these people spoke with her and accepted her toonie for a cup of coffee.

We have taken that story and offer today some signs that could be carried by people on the street. As you read the various signs, we hope that you can imagine the story behind the sign, as we have. What is the story represented by these signs? Let your imagination move into a new place just as we have done. And here are our offerings...

On the screen at the front: Cardboard sign "I am Homeless"

Sign #1: "I have people waiting for me at home"

(adult enters and walks to the front of the congregation holding sign #1)

Reader:

I never really *left* home (hand over heart). I just went away to find my place in the world. That's what happens when you grow up. I certainly didn't run away. I simply looked for a way to make money and pay rent. It was hard to get a job – the fish disappeared in my home province, Newfoundland and Labrador, and so I went to work in Halifax. Eventually that business closed, so I went to Alberta. Many people did. But you know the story – the oil price dropped, and the jobs dried up. I came back here but there was no work. If only I had money I could get back to my home town of Corner Brook. I have family there. They would like me to come home, but here I am, stuck.

I have people waiting for me at home – still, now. Will you help me?

Scripture: Luke 15:11-24 Story of Prodigal Son

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

(a cup of coffee is presented to the person with the sign as we seek to embody the gospel)

Chorus: *To the tune of Kelvingrove, VU #96*

**I have people waiting for me at a place called home.
They are always on my mind wherever I may roam.
They provide me with the hope that I need to always cope
Through the many times I'm feeling lost and all alone.**

On the screen at the front: Cardboard sign "What Am I Doing Here?"

Sign #2: "I want to share my gifts"

(adult enters the sanctuary and walks across the front holding sign #2)

Reader:

I used to go to church. All my friends did when I was growing up.

Every time we had a baptism, I remember the minister saying to the baby: "You are a child of God." I liked that. I thought: "If this wee baby is a child of God, then maybe I am a child of God, too."

Most days I didn't feel much like a child of God. My life at home was hard. Too many children? Not enough money? I know my dad drank a lot, and my mother cried a lot. We children just tried to stay out of the way when dad got mad, and mom got upset.

But on a good day I knew I was a child of God. I was a pretty good baseball player. And I could draw better than most kids in my class. I want to use my gifts.

I have gifts to share, and I want to share them – still, now. Will you help me?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11 Spiritual Gifts

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

(a cup of coffee is presented to the person with the sign as we seek to embody the gospel)

Chorus: *To the tune of Kelvingrove, VU #96*

I am keen to share the gifts that God has giv'n to me.

On this day of reaching out I want to be set free

From the turmoil of the past, find a purpose that will last,

Go the distance helping all of those that I can see.

On the screen at the front: Cardboard sign "I Am Hungry"

Sign #3: "May I share a meal with you?"

(adult enters and walks across the front holding sign #3)

Reader:

I do not have enough money to buy food. I try to hide that fact. I just want some lunch or even just a muffin or donut. I would go to the foodbank but I have no place to cook food. Besides, I wish I had a friend to eat with.

I can go to the food court at the mall and pretend the person at the next table is my friend, but it feels funny. And besides, often the security staff usher me out of the building before I get a chance to eat. They don't like the way I look.

Do you know how hard it is to feel good about yourself when you keep getting thrown out of places? No one seems to care.

I want to sit down and eat with someone who is interested in my story – still, now. Will you share a meal with me?

Scripture: John 6:1-11 Feeding of 5,000

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

(a cup of coffee is presented to the person with the sign as we seek to embody the gospel)

Chorus: *To the tune of Kelvingrove, VU #96*

I am here to share a meal with you on this fine day.

God has given us a chance to meet along the way.

Through the caring I have known, I have felt my spirit grow.

Sharing food should be the quest of those who seek Christ's way.

On the screen at the front: Cardboard sign "I am Cold and Lonely"

Sign #4: "Will Someone Care for Me?"

(adult carries sign #4 across the front of the church)

Reader:

I have had enough of winter. Too much snow, sleet, cold wind. It is all too upsetting. Winter can be done today as far as I am concerned.

Oh, I know, someone is going to yell out: "Winter hasn't even started yet!" Yes, winter officially starts this week. But what about people like me who are always cold and wet? I have no place to live and sleep. I am always cold.

Do you see me, or do you read my sign and ignore me? I am a real person. I feel like you ignore me.

I am cold and lonely every day, and every night – still, now. Will you give me a warm, dry place to sleep?

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-40 Looking after the least in the "Kingdom"

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

(a cup of coffee is presented to the person with the sign as we seek to embody the gospel)

Chorus: To the tune of Kelvingrove, VU #96

**On this wintry day I feel the cold, my boots are worn;
Now my sweater's ripped, my hat's been lost, my coat is torn.
What I need is a warm bed, all I get is grief instead,
Will you share a glimpse of God? For all I feel is scorn.**

To make this a spiritual holiday, we invite you to pay it forward – hold the door open for someone, let someone go first, say something kind in the grocery line, drop a note to someone “just because” they deserve a bright moment in their day, buy a coffee for someone in line behind you.

You will receive a package from the children with a card, conveying ideas on it as to what you may do, and a coffee cozy to remind you that we are called to offer warmth, hope and love to those we meet.

It is a witness to our faith. It is part of sharing in God’s mission. It is what the followers of Jesus are willing to do.

(Sing MV #90 “Don’t Be Afraid” as children distribute bags with coffee cozies and cards)