

The Hitchhiker

Tom Stephens

It was our first pastorate. Our church was a quaint little building in a small town in eastern New Mexico sitting proudly on top of a small hill, just a couple of blocks from the two highways passing through town. The congregation was small but loyal.

The parsonage was also a little quaint. You couldn't really call it the basement of the church because the front door actually opened out on ground level. The rest of the house was built into the side of the hill. To reach the church, we walked out our front door, up the stairs to the top of the hill and then into the sanctuary. Wouldn't have been too bad except when it rained, the water ran down the hill and in around our windows. We shared our lodgings with the church mice who lived in the space between our ceiling and the floor of the church. Every night we heard them racing around over head.

Early one morning we awakened to the sound of someone moving around above us. So accustomed were we to the noise of the mice, it took us a few minutes to realize this was no mouse. Someone was in the church! We looked at each other, my wife and I and I knew she wasn't going up to accost the intruder. It was up to me.

I slipped out of bed, pulled on my pants and looked around for a weapon. I spotted the mop on the porch near the front door. It would have to do. Figuring the best defense was a good offense, I let out a terrible yell as I headed up the stairs to the church. I guess it wasn't as terrifying as I thought. The hitchhiker sitting on the stoop looked at me, and said, "What are you doing with that mop?"

After a few minutes conversation on the steps of the church, I invited him to join us for breakfast. Because of our church's proximity to the highways, we soon learned hitchhikers were regular visitors. We never gave them money -- mostly because we never had any -- but we always fed them and shared with them the Word of God.

THE GUEST

One morning in the early fall, the morning was cool and crisp, under overcast skies. The family was barely out of bed. Just before sitting down to breakfast, a small, kindly looking gentleman knocked at the door, I noticed he was not dressed like the other hitchhikers. Neither did he carry the highway odor so many foot travelers had. In fact, as we spoke with him, it turned out he definitely was not the standard every day hitchhiker.

This gentleman was very sweet and humble, simply asking for some breakfast before continuing on with his journey. He didn't even mind we only had the usual oatmeal. It was pretty much all we could afford. He said something like, "Sir, I have daughters in a state north of New Mexico whom I have not seen in many years. I'm hoping to meet with them soon."

As He shared breakfast with our family, we talked about the Lord. And as we talked, I felt the very presence of the Lord with us. As we finished our meal, I offered our guest another helping. He politely declined, "No, but thank you very much. You were so hospitable to me." I walked Him to the door to say good-bye, and noticed it had began to rain. I closed the door behind him, then turned and said to my wife, "Honey, it's raining, and I'm going to take this man to Santa Rosa. That's the least I can do for him."

I grabbed my keys and headed out the door. Only a few seconds had elapsed. But the man was gone. I could see for blocks and there was no one walking anywhere. I got into my car and drove down the streets looking for him. I looked in the post office, and several other stores. I even drove the highway he would have traveled. There was no one.

From the time he exited my front door, he had only a brief time to disappear. When I first did not see Him outside my door, I felt God had sent an angel to minister to us. But I wanted to prove God. I wanted to be perfectly sure about this strange, but Holy feeling in my heart. And so I searched. When I returned home from the search, I had tears in my eyes, and a joy in my heart as I remembered a New Testament scripture verse that went like this:

“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.” (Hebrews 13: 1,2)

“LITTLE BLESSINGS”

Thousands of unexpected events happen to those who serve God. Sometimes hilarious things happen, sometimes embarrassing, and sometimes extremely somber, and awesome. Sometimes, these things are there to remind us it really was because of a divine calling we were where we were. God was showing His infinite grace, or maybe His humor. At any rate, we know we are not forgotten. We know He still has charge over our life. But most of all, we have felt the intense love and peace that comes only from Jesus. These are the “little blessings on the side” that lift the heart for a moment...but are never, never forgotten.

At the same little church in New Mexico we were the recipients of another of those “little blessings”. One morning, I sat at the breakfast table eating oatmeal and airing my feelings. “Why couldn’t we have a real breakfast sometimes,” I asked my wife, even though I knew the answer.

“It would really be nice if we could have bacon or ham with eggs and the works once in a while. I’m so sick of the same old oatmeal every day!” I realized I sounded like a murmuring Israelite stuck in the wilderness. But God heard me all the same.

Before noon that same day, there was a knock at the “front” door. One of the members of our church greeted me with two bags of groceries in his arms. Bringing them to the table, he helped unload the bags. Among the many items were all the breakfast foods I had asked for. I don’t remember each one, but I did have a prayer of thanksgiving in my heart as I looked over the eggs, meats, and other food. When I noted there was not a single box of oatmeal included, I apologized to the Lord in my heart because I knew He was not only revealing to me His love that morning, but He was also sending a message. In His graciousness, He was letting me know how foolish I had acted. He reminded me all I ever had to do was ask.