



## *Blessed By Being a Blessing*

It wasn't as cold that morning. Spring was starting to come, the days were a little warmer, and the sun coming up a little earlier as we served breakfast with our SonRise Kitchen. Normally we could have 20 or 25 people come to get warm soup and a bag lunch and some warm coffee and maybe a bowl of cereal at the park by the levee. But today we seemed to only have about 10 people come - all men. I asked them why there were less people and they said that farming was starting to pick up and people were having to go off to the fields even earlier. We serve at 7am but it's likely that many of them now had to go off to work at 5 or 6am without breakfast. I struck up a conversation with, I'll call him Alberto. In my more privileged world, I was thinking in my head "I wonder what he's doing today, why is he here and not off working like the others?" I asked how he was doing? He said the usual cultural response – he was fine. Then I asked what he was doing today? He said, "Well not really much." To which I said, "Will you be working today?" He said, "Well, I can't."

And I pondered judgmentally, "Why was he here and not working in the fields with the others?" Then he began to lift up his shirt. He said in Spanish, "I have this problem", opening his shirt you could see a J-tube inserted into his abdomen--a feeding tube I was all too familiar with from when my dad had cancer. He said, as we spoke in "Spanglish," that he has cancer in the throat and in the stomach and that he was not able to work. He is getting radiation and chemotherapy in Salinas.

I felt much compassion and pain for him. I can't imagine dealing with cancer, especially stomach cancer, which is very painful and deadly. While in addition to that, dealing with not having the comforts of a home while dealing with such a serious and difficult illness. I wondered if he felt discouraged or kind of pounded on by life that he was dealing with this very serious illness and, ALSO dealing with "where am I going to put my head at night?!" And "would I be safe or would someone rob me as I slept by the river?!"

Needless to say my initial judgment of why Alberto wasn't going to work like everybody else definitely revealed my privileged status, my superior attitude, my cold heart, and how you can't judge a book by its cover. But this man was showing me who truly WAS the stronger one! I was a wimp compared to him!—with a home to lay my head and relatively good health, in my pampered life getting all disjointed when my internet goes out! But He was still going! He still had a smile on his face, he was still connecting with others, he didn't have a bottle in his hand trying to numb away the pain. Life had pounded on him and he was still standing! Would I have still been standing?! (I prayed for God's forgiveness in a silent prayer.)

Humbled, I then got the privilege to pray for this giant, and he soaked it up – he definitely had a sense of just clinging to God and had his own deep spirituality. And then, just as quickly as this angel came into my life, he went... on his way, probably to go to another chemo treatment.

Jesus was homeless. Yup, Jesus himself said, "Foxes have hole, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58) He was a teacher who traveled from town to town sharing of God's love, and ultimately as God Incarnate laid down his life to get us, his children back.

At Westview, as followers of Jesus, we too are called to the blessing of caring for the least and hurting among us, laying down our lives in service. Jesus said that as we care for them we care for Him (Matthew 25). We have been blessed with the joy of serving at the Salvation Army for years until COVID, and we have further been blessed by our SonRise Kitchen serving meals, and love, 5 days/week down at the levee. Well, in the style of our compassionate and whimsical Holy Spirit, several things are happening that seem to indicate God is calling us to continue to care for those hurting and living without homes in even more impactful and meaningful ways.

Firstly, we have a new renter and partner in serving! Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County (CAB) will have its south county offices on Westview's second floor. CAB's mission is to partner with the community to eliminate poverty and create social change through advocacy and essential services. CAB has several impactful programs:

- The youth Homeless Response Team is a collaborative effort between the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County and the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. This supportive services program aims to serve unaccompanied youth between the ages of 15-24 who are experiencing housing instability.

- **Transitional Age Youth Housing Navigation**- Provides Housing Navigation and Housing Focused Case Management services to young adults ages 18-25 who are in Foster Care and assists with completing FUP vouchers (Family Unification Program). TAY NAV's goal is to help clients overcome barriers to attaining and maintaining housing. Providing: Housing Navigation, Case Management, Provide beneficial workshops, Build basic life skills, Linkage to any other services etc.

- Watsonville Works-Provides wraparound services for homeless seeking to transition off the streets, including employment, housing assistance, resume work, and job skills, intensively helping 6-8 people at a time.

- Santa Cruz County Immigration Project's mission is to promote the wellbeing of the immigrant community in Santa Cruz County and the Pájaro Valley by helping immigrants acquire legal status, reuniting immigrant families, and making U.S. citizenship more accessible to eligible immigrants.

CAB is a blessing to the community and will be a blessing to Westview as we care for those without homes and the needy of Watsonville through our SonRise Kitchen.

Secondly, many of those without homes will be displaced by the Pajaro River Levee Project which will commence in 2023 as they fix the levee to prevent flooding. Many of those we serve in SonRise Kitchen live on the levee and will be displaced. Please be in prayer for these vulnerable people. Our leadership is pondering how we as a church can help in this crisis. Is there a way we can use our facility/land to help be the solution and be Christ's love to these desperate people and how might we partner with professionals like CAB and the Salvation Army to be part of the solution? Pray for us to have wisdom and guidance.

I pray our joy and love will continue to overflow from Westview to all in our community. It is a privilege to serve and worship God with you, the Westview Family!

Pastor Dan

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