

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, May 7th 2013

In the first reading from Acts, Paul demonstrates stunning forgiveness, compassion, courage, and selflessness. Unjustly beaten and imprisoned, Paul and Silas were praying and singing when an earthquake shook open the prison. Anticipating that the jailer would think the prisoners had escaped and therefore taken his own life, Paul shouted to the jailer not to harm himself. Imagine: unjustly beaten and imprisoned, and your first thought is concern for your jailer! “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” asked the awed and grateful jailer. “Believe in the Lord Jesus. . . .” came Paul’s decisive response.

Paul’s response to the jailer calls to mind one significant school of theology regarding salvation: faith alone saves. The predominant alternative theology is that we are saved through our works, the good we choose to do. What I find important and humbling in this story from Acts is the response of the jailer to Paul’s invitation to belief: the jailer took the beaten Paul and Silas to his home late at night, cared for their wounds, fed them, and rejoiced. Much like James reminds us in his second chapter that “faith without works is dead,” the jailer shows us that belief and service/justice are inextricably linked. The jailer’s belief triggered generous action. And for many people, action can lead to faith/belief.

I recently experienced this dynamic interplay between faith and works at an event at Creighton University called Project Homeless Connect. Fifty-seven agencies offered services (medical, dental, legal, housing, haircuts, food, etc.) to 318 people who were homeless with one-to-one attention from over 400 volunteers who served as “navigators” (and “advocates” to loosely tie in the Gospel reading). In the days after the event, I heard stories and comments from many service providers and volunteers. I share two comments to illustrate the connection between belief and action, faith and works:

1. This event is the kind of thing that makes Creighton “Creighton”. I interpreted this comment to mean that we live out our Jesuit, Catholic mission/faith/belief through our actions, particularly to such a vulnerable group as those who are homeless.

2. I attended this event to help navigate a homeless person and ended up being navigated by a homeless person. I pointed out where to go to get his dental check up, vision test, Hepatitis shot, etc. He pointed out where I should go to buy a bible, which bible to ask for and even suggested a church to attend. I see this man as my Homeless Angel. In other words, this volunteer’s works led to a deepening of her faith.

Loving God, help us to deepen our faith/belief that we might deepen our commitment to actions of service and justice; and may our actions and choices lead us to you in an ever-deepening faith. Let us rejoice. Amen.

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