

Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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Update #49

December 2008

The gift that I bring to you today is the gift of faith, a gift given to me by the Holy Spirit; a gift given by grace, and not by works. This gift was given to me many years ago during a very difficult time in my life. Two days after giving my life to Jesus Christ, my world, as I knew it, fell apart. As a new Christian, I was wrestling with trying to retain some control over the people and circumstances in my life, and at the same time, wanting to surrender them to God, to lay the broken pieces of my life at the foot of the cross. I lacked faith at that time, and during a time of reaching out to a fellow Christian after church service one Sunday, she said that I could 'borrow' her faith, until I received my own. This was a totally new concept for me, and I thanked God for her, as I did just that; 'borrowed' her faith, which sustained me until I was blessed with my own. As you partner with us in the ministry of UCO, your prayers and financial gifts allow me to share this gift of faith with those whom God puts in my path. I thank God for you, and for your faithfulness, for what he is doing in and through the lives of those he brings before us, and for what he is going to do.

For many of us, this season of Advent is a joyful one, full of anticipation and hope, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ. For many others, it is a time of loneliness and despair. Those whom we serve on the

downtown sidewalks of Ottawa are often broken and wounded. Many are estranged from their families. I often encounter men and women who simply lack the energy to mend relationships; sometimes the pain of their losses is so great that they can't even begin to talk about it. And so sometimes, we don't talk about it, we just sit together and have fellowship, and when The Holy Spirit moves, in his perfect timing, I am able to share the hope that I have through faith in Christ Jesus. But before any of this even takes place, before we even meet, The Holy Spirit has been at work, softening and preparing their hearts to receive. It is very possible that we are the only ones praying for a particular person, and I am reminded of Jesus' words in The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 34-40:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you

something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

(from New International Version)

As partners in the ministry work of UCO, our purpose is to serve Jesus and we do this by coming alongside those who are in need: in coffee shops, malls, prisons, shelters, hospitals and at funerals, as God leads. Recently, we have been helping two new UCO clients who struggle with mobility, and are working to help find a homeless person a new home. Another client is struggling with rejection since being diagnosed with mental illness. Our work in the classroom at the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre (ROMHC) continues with the help of our valued volunteer, Nadia, whose expertise and presence in the classroom is a blessing. Our ministry work is very intentional, as is our walk with Christ, and each day is new.

We often talk about solutions for the poor, the homeless and the marginalized; I believe that God's people are the solution. I have a vision that someday we might have enough UCO workers and volunteers on the sidewalks to come alongside all those in need of the transforming love of Jesus. Many of whom we serve in UCO are not comfortable attending church for various reasons, and so we meet them where they are at.

A couple of months ago, as I walked along, I noticed a woman sitting alone in a busy, public place. It would be easy not to notice her among the crowds,

as she didn't appear to be any different from anyone else, but I sensed that God had a plan. As I walked toward her, I quietly prayed about introducing myself and asked for the words to start a conversation. I felt that God was leading me to do so, but for reasons that I couldn't understand at the time, I was hesitant, and kept walking. I wondered if I was being disobedient to God, but soon realized that it was fear that kept me from speaking to her. I struggled with this fear, and persevered in prayer, asking God to show me what this fear was about. My answer didn't come right away and so I persevered in prayer. Sometime later, I sensed God had revealed that I was avoiding her because of her anger, and it made me think about the protective walls that we can build around us to keep people out. I understand that angry people are hurting people, and so with God's help, I stepped out in faith, sat down next to her and said hello. I expected that she might growl at me, but instead, in a tender, soft voice, she struck up a conversation that would last for over an hour, telling me about her life, and sharing her most pressing concern: loneliness. In her loneliness, she had prayed, and God sent us, to sit with her for awhile, and to reassure her of his love for her, in answering her prayer. She could not believe that I would spend time sitting with her, and told me over and over, that people don't talk to her, let alone sit with her. She has relatives, but doesn't want to bother them because they have busy lives. Perhaps they don't even know that she is lonely.

I often wonder if Jesus is lonely. I wonder how many Christians take time to just sit with him, with no agenda of prayer or petition, but just to sit for awhile. This is our mission at UCO, to introduce those who are broken to the living Christ, the one that they can develop a personal

relationship with, the only One that can truly minister to their loneliness and their needs.

It is my prayer for each one of you, and for all whom we are entrusted to serve, that during the busy weeks ahead, you will have quiet, intentional moments with our Father, special times set aside, to sit in his glorious presence, and allow his love to wash over you, and bless you; special times to sit and love Him. To God be the glory!

During this wonderful time of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the first coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and as we await in anticipation of his second coming, on behalf of our faithful Board of Directors and volunteers, I would like to wish you a joyful, blessed, Christmas.

In Christ Jesus,
Jill Wilson,
Executive Director

From UCO's President of the Board:

Jesus told those who were gathered with him at the Last Supper, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). This is our greatest responsibility as followers of Jesus, to love each other in the profound way Jesus commanded. Urban Christian Outreach seeks to enact Christ's love on the sidewalks of urban Ottawa. During this season, as you think about the meaning of Christ's birth, please consider supporting us financially so that we can continue our task.

Janice Fiamengo

From The Treasurer of the Board:

Dear Friends:

This has been an exciting and a trying year for Urban Christian Outreach. We successfully passed the Executive Director torch from the retiring Katrine Barton-Coward to Jill Wilson. Unfortunately, as of the end of October we were in debt \$550. We experienced higher expenses this year, as both Katrine and Jill were working in this ministry during the transition period.

Since our mission is to be a presence on the streets of downtown Ottawa, we have no assets to borrow against. We require donations in order to continue doing this work. I appreciate the uncertainty of the current economic times and thus I respectfully request that you prayerfully consider your support of Urban Christian Outreach.

If you would like further information concerning our finances, or any other issue, please contact us at (613) 233-6633, or via email at jill@uco-ottawa.ca

Sincerely,

David Wice, Treasurer

IF I'D BEEN BORN IN BETHLEHEM

If I'd been born in Bethlehem
and lived there long ago
I might have seen the travellers
passing to and fro.

I might have been in bed one night
and heard the shuffling feet
of weary people passing by
along the village street;

and just along the alleyway
a shouting and a din,
and someone saying, 'No more room,
there's no room in the inn!'

And then when all was quiet
and the town was fast asleep,
faintly from the fields, perhaps,
the bleating of the sheep.

And looking from the window
above my little bed
I might have seen the Christmas star
shining overhead;

until at last when half asleep,
I might have heard on high
the voices of the angels
all singing in the sky.

Then early in the morning
I should have made my way
with shepherds to the stable
to find where Jesus lay.

I might have really seen Him
and taken Him a toy,
and Mary might have held me up
to kiss her little boy.

She might have let me go there
to see Him every day,
until He would have missed me
if I had stayed away.

And when a little later
they moved from Bethlehem,
and traveled into Egypt,
I might have gone with them.

I could have minded Jesus
while Mary packed their things
and I'd have kept Him company
on all their travellings,

until they came to Nazareth
and settled there to stay.
Then I'd have lived in Nazareth
and seen them everyday.

I might have been with Jesus
when first He tried to walk,
and held His hand and played with Him,
and watched Him learn to walk.

Any Mary might have trusted me
to take Him out to play,
and see that no one worried Him,
or took His toys away.

Perhaps, sometime when Joseph
was busy carving wood,
he might have let us watch him,
if we were very good.

And he'd have made a toy for us,
perhaps a sailing boat,
and Mary might have come with us
to see if it would float.

And Mary would have taught me,
as she taught her little son,
to grow up good and gentle,
and be kind to everyone.

When both of us were old enough
to wander out alone,
we might have gone for rambles
and picnics on our own.

Hand in hand with Jesus
all those happy days,
I might have grown more like Him
and learned His loving ways.

In pleasant grassy places
we might have played for hours,
chasing bees and butterflies,
and picking summer flowers.

Then sitting on the hillside
above the little town
we could have talked together
until the sun went down;

and running home to Mary
when the day was at its end. . . .
How happy I'd have been then
with Jesus for my friend!

I wasn't born in Bethlehem;
nor yet so long ago,
so what I've been pretending
can never happen so.

I still am just a little child,
I still am only small,
and Jesus is the King of Love
and greater than us all.

But if I pray to Jesus
He even now will be
just as near and just as dear
a loving friend to me.

Dear Jesus, please be with me,
from now until the end.
Hold my hand and guide my feet,
and be my special friend.

If I'd Been Born in Bethlehem, Joan Gale Thomas,
A.R. MOWBRAY & Co. LIMITED, London, England,
1953

