

What does it mean to fight the darkness, together?

Today our beloved Street Church family gathered again under the shade of the canal path magnolias. There is something special that happens on this sacred ground every Sunday. Every week, the Holy Spirit's power feels as palpable as the crisp fall air. Right now, when the world constantly feels obscure and upside down, this space just feels right. It feels like Church. Folks can simply be; they can let their guard down and come as they are.

Every week, we have had new neighbors check out our community on Sunday mornings. Sometimes they are passing through and brand new to Micah and the street community. Whether we come broken, bruised, or seeking healing, God meets us in this space. God meets us in our questions and our wrestling, and even shows up in the way we show compassion for one another. That is our hospitality practice, meeting our neighbor wherever they are, from wherever they have come from without question. We all are coming to this space with different backgrounds, perspectives, and starting points, but one thing is universal: God meets us where we are in the moment.

Today, God met us around the community "circle" (we gather in the round) when two young men happened to find their way on the Micah bus that has been picking up our neighbors for church. They shared that they were grateful for the bus because they were able to get some sleep after finding themselves newly homeless and outside. They were grateful for some blessed hot coffee and a sandwich donated by a clergy volunteer.

As we began our scripture reflection on the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37), we wrestled with what it means to show up for our community. Who did we relate to in the story? The person who walked by? The innkeeper? How could we relate to the Samaritan, who was seen as unclean and deemed unfit for any type of "good"? Yet, ironically, Jesus names for us that it is the Samaritan who was an exemplary example of a faithful steward who will inherit eternal life.

The nomadic newcomers spoke up, they shared that they saw themselves as the man left behind by the priest, and the Levite (the common man). They felt like the one left bruised and beaten, left to die. They spoke of the ways that people just walked by them, the ways they felt ignored by their own friends and family, by the Church and expressed a deep sense of abandonment from those they once trusted; the ones who were supposed to be there, no matter what.

I could sense this young man was deeply wrestling with this scripture. He had more questions and suddenly, the dialogue took a turn when this question was brought forward, "but how do we battle this darkness that we may feel inside? Is it just prayer? Or what?"

I sat there for a moment, quietly praying for God to provide the right words. I didn't want to give some generic pastoral response as someone who has not experienced the darkness that can come from experiencing homelessness. Then, without fail, God spoke through this community. The group lit up with responses. Many people stepped up to the microphone to share how God had helped them to overcome their own darkness. One member said, "in order for you to beat the darkness, you must lose yourself to God. In order to save your life, you must lose it," (Matthew 16:25). Each response was one beautiful encouragement after another, this young man who was moved to tears. "Thank you for that," he said, "I really needed to hear that today, thank you for caring."

After church, one of our members ensured the two men had a tent to set up tonight with a sleeping bag and some blankets. Another two, who are now in housing, met up with the young men at their tent-sites later in the afternoon to make sure they had what they needed for the night, until they could come to Micah to start an assessment.

The question remains, how do we show up to one another in the darkness? We fight by showing up as community, together. We welcome one another into our lives through the hospitality we show to newcomers who may be on the street for the first time, showing them the ropes and giving them a lay of the land without regard for where they came from. We meet them in the present moment and encourage one another to not lose hope.

The Samaritan offered what they had in the moment. Despite their perceived "uncleanness" it was the Samaritan who showed mercy for the broken, before the priest who may have preached the deuteronomic (6:5) law to their synagogues. At Micah Street Church, it is the broken showing up for one another. Our love feast is seeking collective healing through the grace of God and with shared humility, just as the Church should be.

As we continue to create sacred space, under these magnificent trees, I am hopeful for the ways that God will continue to show up in our wrestling and questioning in community with one another. I give thanks for the ways our neighbors have opened up their "home" to me and showed me what it means to truly love one another.

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