

When Do I See You, Lord?

By Grace Dukenski

Gordon Mote is a blind Southern Gospel singer who tells a story about a favorite pastor in song. It's Easter and the church is filled with people of all ages. The pastor walks up to the pulpit and delivers this sermon:

Love, Love, Love

There is a stir and murmur throughout the congregation. Some of the people are happy. They will get out earlier than usual and beat the Baptists to breakfast downtown. Some of the people think they are paying their pastor too much for such a short sermon. This won't be that short sermon.

Today's lesson speaks about: **When do I see you, Jesus?**

Matthew 25 speaks of the time the Son comes to separate obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of belief is the way we act. To treat all people we meet as if they were Jesus is not an easy task.

We hear the reference to Jesus returning with all the angels to judge the world. The criteria for those who are blessed involve:

- Feeding the hungry.
- Giving a drink to the thirsty.
- Welcoming the stranger.
- Visiting the sick and those in prison.

Carol Lansing mentioned a story they tell to Sunday school aged children:

Jesus met a man and told him "I will visit you today." The man made a special meal and waited.

There was a knock at the door. A beggar asked for a piece of bread. The man gave him some bread and sent him on his way. He continued to wait for Jesus.

There was another knock at the door. A family stood there. They asked for a drink of water. The man gave them some water and sent them on their way. He continued to wait for Jesus.

Several knocks and responses later, he went to bed sad because Jesus never came to dinner. The next day he saw Jesus and said "I really hoped that you would visit me last night. Why didn't you come to dinner?"

Jesus says, "Weren't there people at your door?"

The man says, "Yes I gave them what they requested."

Jesus replied "Then you saw me!"

When you see Christ in those around you, you want to help. But, as Martin Luther reminds us: We are both saint and sinner simultaneously. As a result we sometimes hesitate in “..... joy and service....” As our Purpose Statement says. We are each and all a work in progress.

Let’s look at the first criterion. “For I was hungry and you gave me food.”

Joe Bales and other people involved in the Thursday Food Pantry truly help those in need. They give them a chance to “shop” for wholesome food, donated and provided and dispensed by people who care. They go out and bring it to Salem, sort it, and carefully display it so clients can actually make choices. **Blessed to be a blessing.**

How about criterion number two? “I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”

At Salem we offer the wine and bread at the altar. This is blessed and shared freely. **Blessed to be a blessing.**

The third criterion: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

As people enter our church for 9:30 AM or the 4:30 PM services we greet them. After the 9:30 service we invite all to coffee hour. Linda Bryk invites all members to sign-up and share with others. Sometimes a new friendship develops over a warm beverage and delicious morsel, be it fruit or another treat.

At 4:30 Sunday Night Alive Dinner Church (SNAC), a meal is provided.

During the week, after Theatre Thursday, at 6:00, a meal of soup is shared. The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport uses our kitchen to teach culinary arts and prepares and provides the soup for this meal.

Blessed to be a blessing.

The fourth criterion: “I was naked and you gave me clothing.”

Salem sends articles of clothing to the Community Suppers at Golden Hill Methodist church as well as participating in the seamen’s project and other projects for those in need. **Blessed to be a blessing.**

Next criterion: “I was in prison and you visited me.”

The Council of Churches has a program to assist recently released people. They receive information and assistance to help them re-enter society. **Blessed to be a blessing.**

The last criterion: “I was sick and you took care of me.”

My first “friendly visitor” assignment was to a faithful member who used to pick up several other members on her way to church every Sunday. I arrived at Anna’s home, and as I entered, she was trying to give her big, old dog a pill. She asked if I could help. I did, but have since given up giving medicine to unknown animals. She was born in the same year as my mom. We bonded over shared stories about our moms.

Salem has a program for people who cannot make it to church. There are parishioners who visit them and Eucharistic ministers who share communion with them if they choose. Their names are on the Homebound board, on the right as you go up the ramp to the lounge. Their names used to appear in the bulletin monthly as a reminder of their membership at Salem. As you can see, Salem members are involved in this caring venture. **Blessed to be a blessing.**

In conclusion, by showing mercy in these situations, you receive mercy. You get an awareness of knowing love by showing love to others. Christ came to free us and take our sins away on the cross. He walked among us to teach us the way to eternal life. He died that we may live. We are his hands and feet on earth. We are Easter people.

Love, Love, Love