

Angels unaware

Carolyn, a good friend and nurse, living in South Dakota, emailed me the other day about an interesting experience she had while out gift-giving others just before Christmas on her day off from work. She wrote, "Sweatshirts and socks at the Banquet, a place for homeless to eat and get needs met. On leaving, noticed a man bleeding and a secretary holding tissues on his arm so I said I was a nurse and offered to help. So, put on gloves and did a pressure dressing over the cuts on his left forearm. The woman called 911 and I talked with dispatch. Ambulance sent. So I had to talk to Gary, the drunk Indian, who tried to kill himself with a new razor because he fed his family at eleven p.m. And they would not let him stay so he wandered the streets all night in 10 degree weather. He ate at the Banquet then got the razor to go "shave". So I talked to him and he insisted that he would kill himself and cried because no one cared about him. So I told him that I cared and God loved him and that I would pray for him. So, then, he would struggle and get the dressing off, wanting to bleed. I just talked and talked until 4 officers arrived. Then paramedics took over. So I tossed gloves and took off. One lady thanked me and said. This was planned somehow that you would be here. Told her yes because I took a detour downtown after being blocked by a stopped train. This was after delivering gifts to a poor family, spending an hour at the mall angel tree and consoling my friend about her grandkids being abused. The dad kicks his son and tried to make him eat his vomit!! Well hope we all never experience lives like these people."

She followed this email with another that read, "Was on me because now I know up close why I tie fleece to make blankets for the homeless, that money in an envelope to the poor has a face and that God really does care and answer prayers. Gary had a warm bed for that night just as I promised and he was going to get the counseling he needed. When Gary tried to wrestle me away so he could bleed more, but my mom voice took over and I said. "Gary! I am a nurse and I am in charge!! Now let go of my arm!" He did. I told him that God was bigger than both of us and that He would take care of him. I also told him that I loved him and God loved him even more. Please pray for Gary. Meanwhile, I am going to make a blanket just for him!"

As I read and responded to Carolyn's emails, I thought of Michael W. Smith and his song, "Angel Unaware." Part of the lyric is as follows:

Maybe there's a light in my soul
Maybe it flickers like a neon sign
Outside an abandoned hotel

Maybe there are things you just can't know
But can you say there are no mysteries
In that house you choose to dwell?
Maybe we are entertaining angels unaware

Maybe there's a place where we will fly
But some, say God is dead like Nietzsche said
And faith has made me a fool

But maybe there is more than meets the eye
Who's that stranger, there, beside you?
Don't be smug and don't be cruel
Maybe we are entertaining angels unaware

I realized that Carolyn was that angel who showed up to minister to an unaware Gary at his hour of need. Her detours along the way that day led her to the place God had sent her as an angel unaware.

At this time of year, we talk about angel trees, angels announcing the good news to a virgin and shepherds, but we also meet them daily, sent by God, often us being unaware of their presence and mission.

I am reminded how Patrick Kavanaugh, Irish writer, poet and farmer in his poem, "The Great Hunger," sees "God is in the bits and pieces of Everyday - A kiss here and a laugh again, and sometimes tears, A pearl necklace round the neck of poverty."

I suppose if we see "God in the bits and pieces of every day," then Christmas Day is every day.