

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2010

Mission Tuesday #79



The homeless...

I am ashamed to even admit that I used to think people who were homeless were lazy, drug addicts, possibly convicts, and really had no purpose in life. I'm embarrassed to share that my thinking was, *"If they really wanted to change their situations, they would."* I guess I was scared of those who were homeless because they were different than me.

Oh, my...how horrible I feel for ever thinking that way! Today I'm ever so thankful that in little increments, God has taught me to think differently for these ones He loves, and has changed my heart towards them.

Working at Mission of Hope each week, I have become friends with the homeless. I have the opportunity to carry on conversations with those who sleep on the streets, and even eat lunch with them. I get to serve them, laugh with them, and if I'm privileged enough to, I get learn some of their life stories. With some of them, you would never know from looking at them that they are homeless. They may look like you and me. They may talk like you and me. But for reasons that we may never know, they don't have a place to lay their heads at night in a warm (or cool) home like you and I do.

One man in particular has been homeless for years now. He calls me "Miss Julie." He doesn't like to be around a lot of people...he keeps to himself. He seems to have been "lost in the system," and we at the Mission are working on getting the necessary paperwork to get him into housing before the snow flies. We began this process in the spring, and everything still hasn't gone through yet. He's old enough to be my father,

and many times, he reminds me of my father. I don't know where he sleeps at night...I haven't gotten that far in my conversations with him yet. But I think of him each night as I begin to drift off to sleep in my comfortable bed. "Where is he tonight?" "Is he warm/cool enough?" "Is he safe?"

I look for him each morning at the Mission, and I'm relieved when I see him in his usual attire...a pair of dress pants, a button-down shirt and either one of his two baseball caps. He's taught me much about being homeless...you don't have to look, smell, or act any different when you're homeless. He never begs, borrows or asks for anything. He even buys us ice from the grocery store across the street sometimes for our pop and Kool-Aid at lunchtimes to make sure everyone's drinks are cold!

He's not the only one who has made an impression on me. A couple, Kim and J.J., who frequent the Mission had been homeless for as long as I've known them. They would come in to the Mission to shower, maybe grab something to eat, but never wanted to be a burden to any of us. Kim would ask if we needed any help, and they both would do whatever they could to help out...wiping down tables, vacuuming, helping put away deliveries, etc. These two have had a very special place in Kimmie's (one of our staff members) heart. Tom shared with Kimmie and I at lunchtime on Friday some very disheartening and disturbing news...He said our friend, Kim passed away this week due to complications of pneumonia. I understand they "lived" in the park downtown, and they just moved into their own apartment a week or so ago. I feel terrible for our friend J.J., losing the love of his life, especially just after getting into their own home. Even if you're homeless, you can still want to help others, you can still fall in love, still grieve over the loss of loved ones...you still have feelings and a purpose for your life.

I'm realizing I never got to say goodbye to Kim. I never got to tell her how special I thought she was. Many others didn't get to do that either. You just never know when will be the last time you see someone. May I suggest each of us make time with others special and memorable...not knowing when will be the last time we'll be with them.

Are those who are homeless much different than me? The more I know of them, the more I'm seeing that answer is a big NO. Maybe some want to live on the streets by

choice. Maybe some want to live on the streets because that's all they know. Maybe some want to desperately have a home to live in, but there's no possibility of that for whatever reason. Either way, I want to do my part to help those who are homeless, in whatever ways I can. I'm thankful God has changed my thinking and attitudes towards those who live differently than me through my time at Mission of Hope!

The next time you see someone who's homeless, or who you think might be, will you please reach out to them? You might be helping my friend who's currently waiting on housing, or you might be helping someone like J.J. who has lost the love of his life. They need friends too.