

Former Slave, Catholic Hero

In the mid-1800s, former slave Samuel Henderson led a small Black Baptist congregation in Memphis, Tennessee, but he followed an unusual Sunday routine. First, he attended Mass at nearby St. Peter Catholic Church. Then, he returned to his own church to preach on what he had heard in the priest's homily.

As reported by *The Tablet's* Bill Miller, Henderson got a job doing maintenance tasks at St. Peter's and soon after converted to Catholicism. In 1878, yellow fever swept through Memphis, killing thousands. The Dominican friars who ran St. Peter's ministered to the sick despite risks to their own health.

With lantern in hand, Henderson guided them to their patients at night. Henderson expert Morris Butcher said, "Memphis was not a great place to be a black man, much less a black Catholic. He chose the most dangerous option."

When some friars died of yellow fever, Henderson prepared their bodies for burial because he seemed to be immune to the disease. He remained a beloved and devoted member of St. Peter's until his death in 1907.

Be strong and bold...It is the Lord your God who goes with you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Jesus, thank You for courageous role models.

Jump Roper to the Rescue

During the 1980s and 90s, professional jump roper David Fisher became well-known for his fast and creative routines. In the year 2024, he used his skills to save a life.

As reported by the *CBC's As It Happens*, Fisher was at home in Westfield, Indiana, when his son, Felix, heard a woman screaming. He learned that the woman, her son, and their dog had been walking near a partially iced-over pond when the dog ran after some geese and fell into the freezing water.

The woman's son tried to save the dog, but fell into the pond himself. Felix alerted his father, who quickly grabbed his ropes and ran to the scene. While the dog had managed to swim to shore, the son flailed and screamed.

Fisher inched onto the ice, threw one of his ropes five meters to a point where the young man could grab it, and pulled him back onto the ice, saving his life. Fisher said, "I've always had these crazy scenarios of how a rope could be used to defend or...save. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think something like that would actually happen. But it did."

**Rescue me from sinking in the mire.
(Psalm 69:14)**

When others are in distress, Lord, guide me to be a life-saving presence.

When the Light Finds Us, Part 1

When Judy Henderson was growing up, her father beat her, her siblings, and her mother. When her mom sought guidance from their minister about the problem, he told her to just “pray about it.” And since their church was the “fire and brimstone” kind, Judy was left with an image of God as “cruel.”

Later, in Judy’s own 12-year marriage, her husband was abusive as well. “I was just passive,” she explained during a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her memoir *When the Light Finds Us*, “and it was learned behavior. You don’t ask certain things...You just go along with what it is... I wasn’t aware of battered women’s syndrome. That was something in those days that you didn’t discuss outside the home.”

When Judy met a man named Greg shortly after her divorce, he came across as the opposite of her former husband. “What I saw was this gentle man that was kind to my children,” she observed. “He wasn’t mean to me. He wanted to know everything about me, even about my years of abuse...not thinking that was something he was going to use to manipulate me to do what he wanted me to do.” More tomorrow...

His mouth is filled with...deceit. (Psalm 10:7)

Protect me, Lord, from those who would abuse me.

When the Light Finds Us, Part 2

Judy Henderson admitted there were “red flags” that she missed when dating Greg. Because she was abused in her first marriage, she didn’t ask questions that might provoke Greg to anger. That led to her not recognizing his dark side until it was too late: he murdered a man and pinned the crime on Judy. She was sentenced to life in prison while he got off scot-free.

“The woman I am today is not the woman I was then,” Judy reflected. “I found out during my incarceration that...you don’t have to be addicted to drugs, alcohol, gambling. My addiction was love.”

Judy’s therapist explained to her that as a child, she should have been experiencing the love of her father. Instead, she endured the opposite, prompting her to seek love from the wrong people. “Whenever [Greg] was kind and nice and didn’t try to abuse me or hurt me in any way,” she said, “I took that as a great sign. And it wasn’t.”

Judy chose to use her time in prison to become “better, not bitter.” As a result, she improved not only her own life, but many others as well. More tomorrow...

Let light shine out of darkness.
(2 Corinthians 4:6)

*Lead abused women to get the help they need,
Holy Spirit.*

When the Light Finds Us, Part 3

When Judy Henderson arrived in prison with a life sentence for a murder she did not commit, she felt understandably angry. But Judy's soul found new life after she attended a three-day Catholic Charities retreat that she resisted going to because of her resentment towards God. That resentment was melted by the love she received from the workers running the retreat.

"God became so real," Judy explained. "I saw how they brought us food, they brought us all kinds of understanding. They didn't care what we were there for, they didn't even want to know... But when they washed our feet, that moment changed my life. Here they were kneeling down to me and showing me a love that I hadn't known in a long time."

"That made me realize that this is the love I had been looking for all my life: the God love. To fall in love with God, to fall in love with Jesus, to do His work, to do what He created me to do. If it took this journey to get me to that point, then I was willing to walk it and learn what it was I needed to learn." More tomorrow...

If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (John 13:14)

How can I reflect Your love to someone today, Jesus?

When the Light Finds Us, Part 4

Following her acceptance of God's love, Judy Henderson began helping her fellow inmates in a simple way. As a professional hairdresser, she did their hair and makeup, which led them to feel better about themselves. Then she became a fitness trainer to get them in shape and get any drugs out of their systems.

Judy also earned certification as a paralegal, who appealed for—and often won—clemencies for other inmates; she taught incarcerated mothers how to break the “generational curse” of abuse and crime; and she created a group for battered women.

During an interview about her memoir *When the Light Finds Us*, Judy said, “I always kept this verse above my cell mirror...Jeremiah 29:11, ‘I know the plans I have for you, a future, not to cause you harm.’ I knew that prison is not where God wanted me to be. This wasn’t His doing. These were my choices...Satan was trying to kill, steal, and destroy. I think I got so angry, in a good way, that I was going to beat [the devil] at his own game.” More tomorrow...

**I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord...
to give you a future with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)**

*Help me be a healer in my own unique way,
Lord.*

When the Light Finds Us, Part 5

Though it took 36 years of appeals by Judy Henderson's attorney, she finally won her release in 2017 when Gov. Eric Greitens commuted her sentence after reviewing the details of the case, which even the original prosecutor came to see as unjust.

Some time after her release, Judy gave a talk at Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph. The CEO offered her a job then and there because she had such a positive spirit that lacked anger or bitterness. Though Judy hadn't been looking for work, she accepted the offer because she now gets to continue serving God through serving others.

Judy hopes that readers of *When the Light Finds Us* embrace its message of loving God, loving your neighbor, and pursuing redemption. She concluded, "People create their own prisons out here, I've noticed. It doesn't have to be steel bars. Don't let the enemy do that to you. Don't let the enemy steal your joy. The best way to get joy is by helping others. And when you help others... blessings come to you all the time."

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

Lead those in prison to Your mercy and love, Father.

From Super Bowl Star to Literacy Advocate

Malcolm Mitchell is well-known as the Super Bowl champion who played football with the New England Patriots, but now he is redirecting his skills to promote literacy.

Mitchell told *Atlanta Magazine*, “Everything I learned from football—whether resilience, accountability, change, or overcoming adversity—has crafted my mentality to reading and bringing it to others.”

Growing up in an impoverished area, Mitchell excelled on the football field, but it wasn’t until college that he realized he still struggled with reading. He resolved to improve his literacy skills, so he went to the bookstore to read as many books as he could get his hands on.

Today, Mitchell has turned his attention to writing books and inspiring students to find a love for reading. “Sports or hobbies are important,” he concluded, “but also, here’s this other thing [reading] that’s even more important.”

You are urged therefore to read with good will and attention. (Sirach 1:1)

Lord, may we continue to educate our young people so that reading can open up new worlds to them.

Shoes Bring Joy

St. Christopher's Inn in Garrison, New York, offers physical, emotional, and spiritual healing to men who are homeless and addicted. Sometimes, these "Brothers Christopher," as they are called, deliver healing to others as well.

Father Bob Warren of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement shared a story in their newsletter about one such instance. Several winters ago, one of the friars drove a group of men in the program to New York City to distribute blankets to people who were living on the streets.

When the Brothers Christopher were returning to Garrison, the friar noticed one of his men had no shoes. The young man told him, "I gave a man a blanket, but he had no shoes, and I thought: What would Jesus do? So, I gave him my shoes."

Prior to this incident, this young man had been "hardened, angry, and uncooperative." But his act of kindness evoked a smile that seemed to emanate from his soul. "Isn't it wonderful," Father Bob wrote, "how a simple, caring gesture can bring such joy not only to those who receive, but also to those who get the opportunity to give?"

Give, and it will be given to you. (Luke 6:38)

Help me experience the joy of giving, Jesus.

Dress with Less Stress

Stella Puzzo was born with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy. At age five, reported *CBS News*, she needed to have “double hip surgery that left her with casts on both legs and a bar between them—making it impossible for her to wear traditional pants.”

That’s when her mother, Nikki, first asked the question: why shouldn’t her daughter be able to wear pants like anybody else? After removing the seams from one pair of Stella’s pants, Nikki replaced them with Velcro for easy wear/removal.

The enthusiastic reaction to this piece of clothing, especially by one of Stella’s post-op doctors, inspired Nikki and her friend, Joanne DiCamillo, to start an adaptive clothing company. Aptly named *befree*, their motto is “dress with less stress.”

Stella is now a junior in high school. Nikki reflected, “I want to instill in her that she is beautiful, powerful, strong, no matter what...She can always do whatever she puts her mind to, and I believe that.”

**Strength and dignity are her clothing.
(Proverbs 31:25)**

God, may we not allow any hardships to define us.

Quick-thinking Officer Saves Child's Life

In 1998, six-year-old Jeannette Duran was crossing the street with her mother and two brothers in Corona, Queens, when she got hit by a truck, whose driver was blinded by sun glare. The girl's leg got crushed, and she began bleeding profusely.

New York Police Department Sergeant Lino Minetto was nearby and quickly arrived on the scene. He wrapped Jeanette in a blanket and rushed her to the hospital in his patrol car.

Jeannette was not expected to survive, reported the *Daily News*, but Minetto recalled seeing a dozen of her family members in her hospital room kneeling and praying for her recovery. Though the girl needed to have her leg amputated, she survived and, with the help of a prosthetic leg, thrived.

The Duran family adopted Minetto as an "uncle." When Jeannette was young, Minetto raised money to help support her future—and as an adult, she invited him to her wedding. In addition, Jeannette's brother, Xavier, who witnessed Minetto's life-saving act, became a police officer himself, noting, "I wanted to do what he did for my family...to make a change, make a difference."

Rescue me speedily. (Psalm 31:2)

May we emulate those who act heroically, Lord.

Respite Room for Kids with Autism

Children and adults with autism or ADHD may avoid attending Mass because they experience sensory overload due to the crowds, bells, and music. St. Joseph's Church in Maplewood, New Jersey, has found a solution.

Father Jim Worth, the pastor, converted an old confessional into the Still Waters Sensory Room. Created in association with the nonprofit "Together We Bloom," which empowers children with disabilities, the room's decor is designed to calm the senses and includes objects such as "a weighted lap blanket, low lighting, fidget toys, and headphones."

Father Worth told *Aleteia*'s Theresa Civantos Barber, "I have witnessed people going in for a short time and then coming back to the main assembly. Our goal is to make everyone feel like they belong...The most important thing is to remember and exercise loving acceptance and patience with all parishioners. Many suffer from hidden difficulties that can prevent them from attending Mass. It's my ardent desire to help them feel like they belong here as much as everyone else."

**Whoever welcomes you welcomes Me.
(Matthew 10:40)**

May we welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ with special needs, Jesus.

Expectations in Marriage

Before coming to The Christophers in the late 1970s, the late Father John Catoir ministered to people in broken marriages for about 10 years. One of his favorite pieces of advice in that work came from Bishop Louis E. Gelineau of Providence, Rhode Island, who had come up with a wonderful idea for helping married couples stay together.

In the Providence area, the bishop initiated a 10-year program for renewal of family life. In doing so, he said, "It doesn't take ideal men and ideal women to make ideal marriages. Ideal marriages are made by ordinary men and ordinary women in partnership with Jesus Christ."

There are two truths here. The first is that without spiritual help, it's difficult to make marriage work. Husbands and wives ignore their spiritual needs at their own peril. The other truth is that marriage shouldn't be overly idealized. Your spouse will let you down sometimes. So, keep your love for each other extraordinary, but your expectations down to earth.

**A threefold cord is not quickly broken.
(Ecclesiastes 4:12)**

Sanctify all marriages, Redeemer.

Happily Ever Aldi

Two years ago, Charles Phillips and Holly Walker ended their first official date with a short trip to their local Aldi's supermarket. Recalling the event for *Today.com*, Walker wrote, "We took a selfie in the Aldi Finds aisle, and I decided to post it to an Aldi group on Facebook, and people loved it!"

Fast forward nine months, and the Detroit-based couple returned to the same Aldi Finds aisle, this time to pose for an engagement photo (although the actual proposal took place at Lake Saint Clair).

When Walker shared this picture in the store's Facebook group, not only did it get more than 17,000 Likes, it also brought a personal emailed invitation for the two of them to a special candlelit dinner, hosted and made exclusively by their favorite neighborhood stomping ground, Aldi's.

"Turns out, happily ever after is an Aldi thing," the supermarket posted on its Instagram page, along with a touching slideshow of the pair's celebratory four-course meal. "Where others found low prices, Charles and Holly found romance."

**Let marriage be held in honor by all.
(Hebrews 13:4)**

Lord, may we always commemorate true and abiding love.

Christ in Our Neighborhood, Part 1

When Bishop John Dolan began serving the people of the Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, one of his goals was to create small groups where people could grow in both faith and friendship. In 2022, he launched Christ in Our Neighborhood (CION) to make that dream a reality.

As reported by Catherine Mulhern in *The Catholic Sun*, “CION reflections, which are free and easily accessible in both English and Spanish, are comprised of approachable reflections on the upcoming Sunday Mass readings, questions for discussion, and a recommended task to bring the fullness of the Gospel into everyday life.”

Bishop Dolan observed, “A lot of times people will come to these gatherings with no faith or theology at all, or many are coming with personal struggles or troubles with the Church. But when they gather in a small group, they are speaking with friends, and they can share their hearts and journey together...It all leads to breaking open the Word of God together, sharing in the ups and downs of life and fostering...community.”

**Where two or three are gathered in My name,
I am there among them. (Matthew 18:20)**

*Help us build strong faith communities,
Savior.*

Christ in Our Neighborhood, Part 2

Jean Loudenslagel has become an enthusiastic supporter of the Christ in Our Neighborhood (CION) program. At least once a month, she welcomes her fellow parishioners, ranging in age from 30s to 80s, to sit around her dining room table and reflect on Scripture and life.

After hearing about CION, Loudenslagel looked around at the midday Mass she attended and noticed there were elderly folks and widows there. She asked if they might be interested in joining a CION group, and they responded positively.

Bishop John Dolan noted, “People are just excited to be invited to someone’s home. They are exposed to the Word of God, and they see that others in the group are normal and are also experiencing struggles, too. If they aren’t currently going to Mass, they may connect with others in their group who are and say, ‘I could do that, too.’”

CION’s reach and effectiveness continue to grow, helping to make faith a guiding force in more and more people’s lives—and giving them the means to take that journey of faith together.

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)

Allow me to share my journey of faith with others, Jesus.

A Prayer for Fasting

As Christians prepare to celebrate Lent, fasting will once again become part of our lives. In his book *The Handy Little Guide to Fasting*, Deacon Greg Kandra offers a prayer to help us approach this endeavor with the right attitude. Here is an excerpt:

“Jesus, You knew hunger and loneliness during Your days in the desert. Help me to feel less alone during this fast. Uplift me when I feel weak. Support me when I feel tempted. Help me to keep my eyes fixed on You and to see in Your eyes the suffering eyes of my brothers and sisters, in all their hunger and yearning.”

“Holy Spirit, inspire me to find in my own yearnings and cravings a deeper yearning for intimacy with You. Reawaken in my heart Your gifts: Wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, piety and knowledge, and fear of the Lord. Direct my thoughts beyond my own weakness—what I have done and what I have failed to do—that I may emerge from this fast renewed and restored. Amen.”

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...to let the oppressed go free? (Isaiah 58:6)

Jesus, allow my fasting to lead me closer to You and to ease the suffering of those who need help.

God's Call on Ash Wednesday

“Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Those are the words with which priests and ministers mark the foreheads of Christians on Ash Wednesday every year, reminding us that death will eventually come for us all. That thought can be depressing while at the same time reminding us that God has prepared for us an eternal destiny.

In the Jesuit newsletter *Now Discern This*, Eric Clayton reflects, “God beckons us forth from that dust. God molds us, shapes us, crafts and polishes us. God delights in our beauty and our wonder...God so treasures us in all our dust and glory that God continues to call us—even once we've returned to that same dust—to enter more deeply into God's great dream.”

“We share a common origin and destiny,” Clayton continues. “We are bound to the material world and yet invited by the God of the universe to transcend it...God pulls us out of the ordinary, the tactile, the ‘stuff’ of the earth...[But] in and through that ‘stuff,’ God invites us deeper and deeper into the Easter mystery, into the promise of the Resurrection.”

**I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting...and ashes.
(Daniel 9:3)**

Lead me towards eternal life with You, Jesus.

Flowers Serve as Silent Prayer

As a resident of Seattle, where the winters can be gray and gloomy, Cameron Bellm searches her neighborhood for signs of color. Writing at *Jesuit Media Lab*, she noted, “Beyond looking for hope in the dirt, I wanted these walks and the record I kept of them to be in service of something else: a quiet bow to the sacred specificity of the natural world.”

With help from her smartphone, Bellm began learning the names of every type of flower she saw. Her exercise went so well that she decided to take it up as a contemplative practice for Lent. “It has been so fruitful for me to accept the invitation to slow down, to look and to find in every plant along my way a silent prayer to the Creator,” she observed.

“In my second year of this practice,” Bellm concluded, “I can now greet many of the plants and flowers along my walks as old friends. They remind me that there is an inherent logic within all creation, an inner knowing that guides us all on our path of life and growth. It is a wisdom all its own, and it is just the comfort I am seeking this Lent, an assurance that we are known, and tenderly held, by a great mystery.”

**On Your wondrous works I will meditate.
(Psalm 145:5)**

Help me appreciate the natural beauty around me, Creator.

Danger Off the Beaten Trail

Kell Morris and his wife, Jo Roop, went hiking near Godwin Glacier in Alaska on “an isolated and undeveloped trail” filled with precariously perched boulders. As Morris made his way along an embankment, he slipped and fell 20 feet into an icy creek as “an avalanche of boulders” fell around him.

The only reason the 700-pound boulder directly above Morris didn’t kill him was that it was being held up by the smaller boulders. But he was still pinned underneath it, face down. As his wife contacted rescuers, she managed to hold his head up so he wouldn’t drown in the freezing waters.

As reported by Mark Thiessen for *The Associated Press*, a sled-dog tourism company had a helicopter in the area and diverted it to bring firefighters to the scene. The firefighters used air bags to lift the boulder up just enough that Morris could be dragged out from under it.

Though Morris was taken to the hospital, he shockingly didn’t have a scratch on him. “God was looking out for me,” he concluded. He added that the next time he and his wife go hiking, they will stick to “established trails.”

Rescue me speedily! (Psalm 31:2)

God, bless all first responders whose work saves lives.

Beit Mariam

At the after-school center Beit Mariam (House of Mary) near Amman, Jordan, Sister Rabha Kayrouz of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary serves as a shining light to her community's Christian girls.

As reported by Laure Delaloche in the Catholic Near East Welfare Association's *One* magazine, many of the girls' families live in poverty and suffer the dire consequences that brings. Sister Rabha explained, "Girls are more overlooked within families, while boys are more likely to be encouraged. We chose to focus on those left behind."

The team at Beit Mariam provides educational tutoring, literacy instruction, guidance on personal and emotional growth, and religious lessons. Teacher Amani Masadeh said, "In some homes, there is no mother to ask the girls if they are happy. When they are upset, I show them that I am listening."

The mother of one student revealed that parenting workshops at Beit Mariam have improved her own skills. She called the center a place where "truly everything is positive."

**With great compassion, I will gather you.
(Isaiah 54:7)**

Lead children to find mentors to guide and love them, Holy Spirit.

A Vehicle of Joy and Grace, Part 1

As a child, Sister Ave Clark decided that she either wanted to be a Radio City Rockette or a nun. Her mother responded that she should pursue her performing dreams first, then become a nun 10 years later. The young Clark mulled it over and ultimately decided, “I’m not going to be a Rockette. I’m going to be a nun who dances a lot.”

Sister Ave’s father once told her she was going to “evangelize the world.” She didn’t know what that meant at the time, but she certainly does now. She chose to join the Dominicans, which are a preaching order, and has served others joyfully for more than six decades. She also still enjoys kicking up her heels—though not quite as high as in her younger days.

But Sister Ave’s true specialty is helping the spirits of downtrodden people to dance again by showing them grace, mercy, and compassion through her Heart to Heart Ministry program—and simply in everyday life. She shares some of her wisdom in the books *Joy is Blooming* and *Alleluia: A Grace to Hold Life’s Interruptions*. More tomorrow...

**Let them praise His name with dancing.
(Psalm 149:3)**

Messiah, help me to lift the spirits of those I encounter today.

A Vehicle of Joy and Grace, Part 2

Evangelization comes naturally to Sister Ave Clark. She's one of those people who connects with everyone she meets: the workers at her bank, the gas station attendant who fills her tank, the handyman, the postman, the grocery store workers whom she interacts with while shopping, etc.

"Anybody that comes into my space in life, or I into theirs, I hope we'll remember each other," Sister Ave explained during a *Christopher Closeup* interview. "I just love sharing my joy, my happiness. Have I had tears in life? Yes. And this past week, three of my dear Sisters returned to heaven. You have that moment where you miss them. Then all of a sudden I say, 'I'm glad I had the moment of cherishing what they gave to me: friendship, example, inspiration, simplicity.'"

"We better look at how we see people in life," Sister Ave added. "Not in a greedy way, or what will you do for me? It's about that relationship...and it's also about restoring hope and mercy and peace to our world. That's the way I live."

More tomorrow...

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you...This is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

May my words and my life speak of Your love, Father.

A Vehicle of Joy and Grace, Part 3

Sister Ave Clark finds particular inspiration for joy in the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in her Magnificat, when she proclaims, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Sister Ave noted that we don’t have to magnify the Lord in large ways. It can happen through the smallest acts of love.

“I look across the street every day,” Sister Ave said during a *Christopher Closeup* interview, “and I see a man put his special [needs] son, who is nonverbal, on this bus. He waits until it leaves, and sometimes I see the man’s shoulders kind of slump. He’s back out there at 3:15, waiting for his son. And when the bus pulls up, the son gets off, gives his father the bag...and they hug each other.”

“The father will not change the son’s mental capacities or his emotional life, but what I see is love. That’s what I see [in Mary’s example as well.] Each one of us can magnify...Mary’s loving ‘yes,’ her loving trust, her loving humanity, her loving [in] walking to the Cross. That’s where our Magnificat happens in our ordinary life.”

More tomorrow...

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. (Luke 1:47)

Mary, teach me to magnify your Son’s great love.

A Vehicle of Joy and Grace, Part 4

Sister Ave Clark believes we can find hope, even in life's hardships, with the help of God's grace. That's why she wrote the book *Alleluia: A Grace to Hold Life's Interruptions*. For guidance, she looks to Jesus on the Cross and how His response to His own suffering can serve as a guiding light to us today.

Sister Ave said, "When I think of the Cross—we've all had our own, and I know it can be painful—[I remember] that the Lord forgave. In the midst of His suffering, in the midst of all the chaos that must have been going on, and the anger, too, surrounding everything, the Lord turned and looked at a need in the midst of suffering."

"That is what God wants us to do. Don't be frozen by not forgiving. Don't be frozen by holding onto a grudge. Don't be frozen if somebody keeps hurting you or you don't understand why people act a certain way. Be the repairer of the breach, be the restorer of kindness, be a person of resurrection. That was the message that I saw from Christ on the Cross." More tomorrow...

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another; even as I have loved you. Just as I have loved you, you should also love.
(John 13:34)

May I learn to love others as You do, Jesus.

A Vehicle of Joy and Grace, Part 5

When we move beyond anger and resentment, relationships can be restored. That was the case with Sister Ave Clark's friend, Joan Kovacs, and her daughter, Karen. Due to mental illness, Karen was in and out of homeless shelters for years. All this time, she was estranged from Joan, who never stopped worrying or caring about her.

One day, Karen wandered into a church, where she saw a flyer for Sister Ave's Heart to Heart Ministry program, in which she counsels people who suffer from various types of traumas. Karen started calling Sister Ave to talk with her, later learning that Sister Ave was also a friend of Joan's.

After some time, Karen let Sister Ave know she was in the hospital dying of breast cancer and wanted to see her mother. Sister Ave contacted Joan, who flew in from Minnesota to reunite with her daughter. "I knew that this was a moment that Joan [had wanted] for over 40 years," Sister Ave observed. "[Joan] came in, and the next day, she held [Karen] as she went back to the Lord...[Joan] never forgot that moment."

More tomorrow...

Love covers all offenses. (Proverbs 10:12)

*Grant me the grace to practice mercy,
Paraclete.*

A Vehicle of Joy and Grace, Part 6

As Sister Ave Clark drove past the same spot every day, she noticed a homeless man waving at her. One day, she pulled over to talk to him and learned his name was Peter. They shared cookies and juice and got to know each other on a human level that represents Sister Ave's conception of the church.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Sister Ave reflected, "Where is the church? It's in you. It's in me...It's in people with tears. It's in people who laugh. It's in children with special needs who can't talk. It is when we listen, not just with the ear...but with our heart, and we see."

"I'm inspired by all the people I meet, and they've made me, hopefully, a better person... Struggle doesn't make us bad people, even as we make mistakes. Maybe struggle is there to refine us and restore us in a better way."

"I know people who are in AA or addiction programs or programs for depression, and every day they get better by sitting with others and saying, 'I care about you. You're my brother, you're my sister.' That's what our world can be. Nobody's a stranger, really, in the world. We're all brothers and sisters."

We...are one body in Christ. (Romans 12:5)

Messiah, remind me that we are all brothers and sisters.

Singing Medicine

Many people are familiar with TV's "flying nun," but has anyone heard of Birmingham, England's singing nurse? Two years ago, Sally Spencer, "an advanced leukemia nurse" and esteemed member of the local "Ex Cathedra" choir, was honored with a "Sky Arts Hero Award."

This award recognized Spencer for combining her two loves: 1) taking care of others, and 2) song. More than 20 years ago, she created "Singing Medicine," a "therapeutic music initiative" that provides "singing-play sessions for patients to help distract and calm them as they receive treatment."

In a *BBC Radio WM* interview, Sally explained, "I became very involved in the choir's education and participation program and did lots of events with children...We did a big celebration event in Symphony Hall, and it was just full of joy. The children were buzzing, and I had a thought that the children I look after [at the hospital] miss out on opportunities like this."

Thus, Spencer's "Singing Medicine" was born. It has since expanded to include "adults affected by stroke and dementia, showing the versatility and healing potential of music."

**A cheerful heart is a good medicine.
(Proverbs 17:22)**

Messiah, may we use our God-given talents to uplift others.