

Thoughts and Smiles – Dec. 13, 2021, Advent Week 3



I was sent to the Kingston Psychiatric Hospital – and before anyone exclaims that *it was about time* – I hasten to add that it was part of a field placement program during my second year of theological studies.

The hospital is a sprawling institution where you can meet all sorts of people at varying degrees of mental wellness. It can be scary, but it can also provide incredible insights into our human nature.

I got to know many of the patients, specifically the lonely psychotic, and depressed, and spent hours in the facility lounge talking and just listening to anything they had to share. There were those beyond connection with anyone. No one wanted to be there, and some realized that it was pretty scary on the outside. For them, the hospital was their sanctuary. As Christmas approached, I led worship services in the chapel, knowing that after the Advent 4 service, I would be travelling back to my family home and leaving my new acquaintances on their own to celebrate the Birth of Jesus.

My supervisor at the hospital was a good-natured, laid back Lutheran Chaplain who wore western (cowboy) boots, blue jeans and had a perpetual disposition that never seemed phased by anything a student or patient might do or say. He called me into his office one day, and I shared with him my sadness at not being able to be with the patients I had come to know over the last few months. He reached into his wallet and pulled out a twenty-dollar bill. He instructed me to go down to the local Christian Supply Store and pick up as many “tacky”

Christmas items as the money would stretch and to make sure to let the store staff know that they were for the patients at the hospital. So I did just that. I looked through the bins and racks and shelves of items I would typically just ridicule as junk and wondered who in their right mind would buy this ~~crap~~ – excuse me, stuff.

I was filling up a basket of Jesus pencils (no sharpeners as the metal blade would not be allowed), palm-size colouring books, wind chimes with bible verses, scripture embossed magnifying glasses, three-inch hourglasses with grains of sand





ostensibly from the Egyptian desert, and, of course, those poorly painted plastic figurines of prominent Bible characters. When I self-consciously told the sales clerk that these were not for me but for people spending Christmas in hospital, she generously grabbed a handful of other items and added them to my pile. I think she mentioned that I was doing HER and the store a favour! When I returned to the hospital a few days later, my supervisor invited me to divide the loot out to anyone I met on my visits. He

didn't forewarn me what to expect. I expected to get these gifts thrown back in my face. But to my surprise the reaction to these gifted trinkets was an enthusiastic welcome, a few warm hugs, and an occasional tear of joy.

I told my supervisor of the overwhelmingly positive response to a simple tacky plastic figure of Jesus. He smiled but was not surprised. He said that the patients here are assigned a room – often with another bed or two, a locker and sometimes a smock to wear. Most of what they own is sequestered until they are discharged from the hospital. Family, friends and co-workers rarely visit. So to be given a gift that is theirs alone by the student minister is perceived as something special to be treasured. Over the coming days they would carry these around, tell the staff what about them, and set them prominently on their bedside table or windowsill. They would bring these items to the Christmas Eve service (yes, my supervisor, in my absence, would be officiating), hold them gently in their hands, and sing the well-known carols and then take them back to their rooms

Since then I've never made fun of those tacky gift shop souvenirs. These are significant and tangible expressions of the heart's longing to someone who might have little and living in uncertainty. They become marvelous Holy relics of paint and plastic. And a lesson on how Grace comes in all forms.



When you tell your Grandma
that you want a car cover for Christmas



Have a terrific week!

Blessings to you all!

David Jones
Minister of Outreach and
Pastoral Care
Hepworth-Sauble Beach Pastoral
Charge
226-568-3476
ipress.jones@gmail.com

Needles

I
wrote
a poem
in the shape
of a Christmas
tree but then forgot
to water it and only a few
days
later

there

were

words

all

over

the

carpet

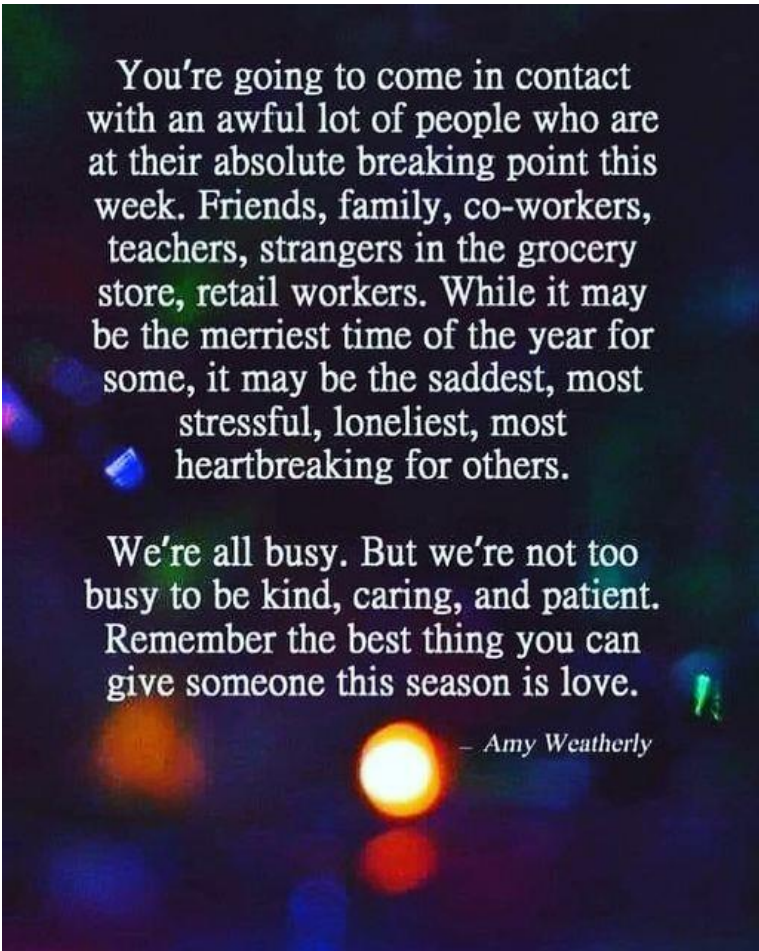
Check out "David's Blog" on the Sauble Beach United Church website.

<https://saubleunitedchurch.ca/category/davids-blog/>

And if you want the on experience of church, follow the link here below...

www.saubleunitedchurch.ca and click: "Watch"

Another link for the service is: <https://youtu.be/DBBQ60diSQ>



You're going to come in contact with an awful lot of people who are at their absolute breaking point this week. Friends, family, co-workers, teachers, strangers in the grocery store, retail workers. While it may be the merriest time of the year for some, it may be the saddest, most stressful, loneliest, most heartbreaking for others.

We're all busy. But we're not too busy to be kind, caring, and patient. Remember the best thing you can give someone this season is love.

– Amy Weatherly