

There was this program in seminary I signed-up to work for for several weeks. Not gonna lie, initially it was just a good way to make some extra money, have housing paid for, cover almost all my meals for an entire summer. Instead, it turned out to be an incredible ministry for myself to witness first-hand.

It was called the Summer Seminary Sampler: high school students, or recent graduates, were invited to come to the seminary for three-week sessions. They would stay in the seminary apartments (not exactly the Hilton, by any stretch of the imagination, but, thankfully, the teenagers didn't seem to care too much about that). We would eat breakfast together before going off to some service project in the morning, ranging from the Ronald McDonald House to Habitat for Humanity. They might have some free time in the afternoon before a class or a presentation at the seminary. They would do Bible studies together, worship together, process how the day went at the end of it all. It was about taking the time to show these soon-to-be adults what's out there, in this world they were about to be fully immersed into after high school. And there were all these ways they could serve that world, including in their very own

communities, wherever they end up, and they didn't have to be a pastor to do so.

However, the most fascinating thing happened when we served lunch at Faith Mission, a men's homeless shelter run by Lutheran Social Services of Ohio (basically the Columbus-equivalent of what we have here in Cleveland through Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries). So, that day, the high school youth were expected to don on aprons and gloves and hats as they helped prepare the food and serve it to the men. Yes, there may have been some teenage awkwardness not knowing these strangers, who were coming up and waiting on them to put on a tray the only source of nourishment they were going to get. After all were served, the youth did some small clean-up and they could just wait out in the main dining hall as the rest of us adults put on the finishing touches in the kitchen.

However, when we opened the doors, the high schoolers had gathered around this one man, who was not much older than them. All he had in front of him was this notebook of paper. On the pages were his own drawings that he put together with nothing more than a pencil. The

youth were mesmerized by him. Maybe they didn't think homeless people were supposed to be talented. Maybe they were under the impression, like so many of us in all of humanity: that the people who no longer have a home to go to was by their own doing. "They didn't work hard enough, they didn't try hard enough, they didn't have enough talent," or whatever else.

So, with that in mind (whether it be subconscious thinking or not), when it comes to homeless shelters and food pantries or with ministry in general: it's blessed *us* helping poor pathetic them. *We* minister them. *We* have something to offer to the...not-as-fortunate them. Except, that day, yes, the youth did serve that young man a lunch: that food would satisfy the needs of his hunger for several hours, at least. And yet, the ultimate ministry, the ultimate feeding of hunger for those young and searching souls, came from the not-so-poor, not pathetic at all; but, evidently, to them: amazing young man. He showed them a world they had no idea existed: as if someone with a different skin color, with a different home-life, with a complete opposite of financial circumstances, was more than capable of serving *them* love and compassion and turn-

your-narrow-minded-idea-of-the-world upside-down ministry. *He* ministered them. He ministered all of us, in fact.

So, maybe, Jesus does have a point after all: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.” As if, in our Savior’s mind, the foremost expert on the whole blessed thing, Jesus says *they* are just as blessed as we are: just as much faith, just as much God in them as us. As if *they* are just as capable of unleashing the transformational power of God’s very loving and saving divine self upon all of us.

And all this young man had to do was to draw out his passion, sketch out his hope, craft on a piece of paper his relentless faith in God and the world God still loves, including him. He was more than entitled to not want to be around those teenagers that afternoon. He could have left the table in shame. He could have reamed them for being born into much better circumstances than him. He could have even asked for more help than they already gave him behind the counter. Instead, he just unleashed his faith and his hope and his passion, and it just ended up being the greatest ministry done in that very room.

Blessed are they, so Jesus tells us. Now, none of this gets us off the hook from feeding the hungry and housing the homeless and caring for those in any need whatsoever. Jesus is, still, desperately calling us to do exactly that as the church. It's just that Jesus also wants to prepare us for our idea of reality to be turned completely upside down: for the *divine* reality that this God is not limited to the better circumstances of life. This God shows up in the absolute worst of them all too, and brings along all the beauty, all the love, all the saving grace that we cannot possibly stop ourselves. Blessed are they, because God says they're not only worthy of our love; they're more than worthy of God's transformational love too. And for that Greatest News of all applying across the board beyond *our* say-so, we give thanks to God indeed!

Amen.