

Wednesday March 13, 2013

The invisible people around us

By Jim Taylor

I watched as a driver pulled out of the Canadian Tire parking lot -- right in front of a motorcycle coming down the curb lane of the main street.

Despite frantic braking, the motorcycle crashed into the car's front fender. The rider somersaulted across the car's hood, landing on the pavement on the far side.

As people rushed to help, I heard the bewildered driver protest, "But I did look for oncoming cars! I did! I really did!"

Precisely. He looked for oncoming cars. Not for motorcycles.

We see what we expect to see. And only what we expect to see.

Missing the obvious

In a famous psychological experiment, participants watched a film of a basketball game. They were instructed to keep track of how often each team controlled the ball.

They did exactly what they were told. And completely missed seeing a man dressed in a gorilla costume stroll across the court.

The community of Lake Country currently has a fund-raising drive to provide a permanent home for the Food Bank. The fund raising isn't going very well, yet. Why not? I suspect many citizens don't see a need for a Food Bank at all.

I've heard people say, "But we don't have any homeless people here." I would have agreed. Until the morning I went to our community hall. As the caretaker straightened out the rubber mat outside the front door, he explained "Someone rolled himself up in it overnight, to keep warm."

Yes, there are homeless in our community. But we don't see them. Because they try not to draw attention to themselves. But also because we don't expect to see them. So we don't see them at all.

If you can't see them...

In the same way, we don't see families struggling to get by. They're not really poor. They have jobs. They own a house.

They got a mortgage years ago. They could barely afford it. But they expected things to get better. Then the kids started growing up. Hockey gear and gymnastics classes got more expensive. Salary increases didn't come through. The car had to be replaced. One of them got laid off...

Now they always seem to have some month left over at the end of the money.

So they drive to the Food Bank. Or the Thrift Shop. They're reasonably well dressed – they have to be, to keep employed. They don't like to look as if they need help.

They're not what the Bible calls "the widows and orphans and aliens in your midst." But the biblical emphasis is clear – help to look after them. Jesus reiterated the message in his parables: "As you did to one of the least of these...."

Every month, 700 of these struggling people rely on the Food Bank. Some come regularly; others only when all else fails. Phyllis MacPherson, the driving force behind the Food Bank, keeps a close eye on those who might be exploiting its services.

The Food Bank currently operates out of two inadequate rooms in a former school. The local Rotary Club has taken leadership in fund raising for a new building. The campaign needs \$400,000 in the bank before it can start construction. The land has been donated. The need is obvious.

But if we don't see them, we can't respond.

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YOUR TURN

It seems that a number of you also struggle with an overly cluttered mental bulletin board.

Jim Henderschedt wrote, "I'll be sharing this one with a lot of people."

Then he added a thought about living with chaos. "Years ago an Assistant to the Bishop paid me a visit. After looking at my desk he said, 'You know, Jim, a cluttered desk is the sign of a cluttered mind.'

"Having been in his office a number times, and knowing that he was a 'neat freak,' I responded: 'And what does an empty desk signify?'"

Nancy Price recalled a cartoon strip that appeared during World War II, about Willie and Joe. "Willie was reading the bulletin board...as all had apparently been instructed to do...A notice underneath all the other notices read 'All troops will fall out at 0600 for the crossing of the Delaware. Signed, G. Washington.'"

Linda Schaeffer was glad that I referred to the music we sing: "Last Sunday I was reading the copyright notices at the bottom of the hymns we were singing out of the Lutheran Book of Worship -- mostly 1700s and 1800s. And I asked myself, 'Has no one in the 20th century written a hymn that merits our singing?' So then I looked in our newest (Evangelical Lutheran Worship) and did find some, written in the early- to mid-1900's.... I wonder when hymns from our current century will get the stamp of approval."

If I may respond, Linda, the last 50 years have had an enormous flowering of religious music. You might find some of it by Googling Fred Kaan, Gordon Light, Carolyn Dade, Shirley Erena Murray, Ron Klusmeier, Pepper Choplin, Dan Shutte, James Manley... Perhaps some of you could add your favorites.

Isabel Gibson liked the bulletin board metaphor: "It's a good way to think about the mess in our heads (well, OK, maybe other people's interiors are tidier than mine) and maybe even gives us a tool for decluttering."

Isabel added a P.S.: "On a side note, I think Nenke's concern about the apparent sexual connotation of 'bang for the buck' may be misplaced -- Wiki has it the way I have it in my head, which is that it comes from a military context."

PSALM PARAPHRASES

Here we are at the Fifth Sunday of Lent already. Psalm 126 is a joyful psalm, usually attributed to the Israelites returning home from exile in Babylon. In searching for a comparable modern experience, I imagined Holocaust

victims being set free, patriarchal males discovering the values of feminism, and flood victims surviving a storm surge. All are valid, but in the end, I settled on this version, of prisoners being released.

1 When the gates of our prisons opened, we could not believe it.
2 Stone walls sank behind us;
the sky opened above us;
we did cartwheels for joy.
Those who gathered to celebrate our release said to themselves, "God has been good to them."
3 Indeed, we could not have set ourselves free;
God must have had a hand in it.
4 Now we must rebuild our broken lives,
like piecing together shards of shattered pottery.
5 May we find as much joy in putting the pieces together
as we had sorrow in their shattering.
6 These new lives were born in pain and suffering;
with God's help, they can still blossom into a second spring.

For this and other paraphrases, you can order *Everyday Psalms* through Wood Lake Publications,
info@woodlake.com or 1-800-663-2775.

HYMNSIGHT

My friend Ralph Milton, who published his Rumors newsletter for many years, has something special for you. It's called HYMNSIGHT, and it's for any church that currently projects the words of hymns and prayers, or plans to.

Ralph writes, Since retiring, I have rediscovered my old love of photography, and found creative use for my pictures in the life of First United where Bev and I worship. Our entire liturgy is projected, so that people read responses and sing hymns from screens. I use my photos to add color, vitality and depth to all the hymns and most of the liturgy.

In the course of this, I have developed slide sets to go with 600 hymns, plus about two thousand slides, in both the standard screen and the newer wide screen shape. You can use all of them, in any way you wish, without permission, and absolutely free, as long as it's non-profit and church related.

All you need to access the website is go to:

<http://www.hymnsight.ca> www.hymnsight.ca

In addition to all that visual material, there's a comprehensive "how-to" manual for those who are new to the idea of using projected visuals in church, and for those who have already begun.

HymnSight provides a set of suggested visuals to go with each hymn, but the words to the hymn are not there, mainly for copyright considerations.

Please take a look to see if this service scratches where you itch. If you think it's worthwhile, please let some of your colleagues in ministry know about it. And if you know of a website that could benefit from a link to HymnSight, why not add it?

Blessings,
Ralph Milton

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
