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1 Peter 4:8-11 **The Voice** translation of the Holy Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers

*Most of all, love each other steadily and unselfishly, because love makes up for many faults. Show hospitality to each other without complaint. Use whatever gift you've received for the good of one another so that you can show yourselves to be good stewards of God's grace in all its varieties. If you're called upon to talk, speak as though God put the words in your mouth; if you're called upon to serve others, serve as though you had the strength of God behind you. In these ways, God may be glorified in all you do through Jesus the Anointed, to whom belongs glory and power, now and forever. Amen.*

**Praying for the Chaplain**

Buzz King

I've been working at Boulder Community Hospital part time as a volunteer chaplain as part of the process of being ordained in the United Methodist Church. We visit patients who need someone to talk to. We support family members who are caregivers. In order to support family members, we also answer code blue calls (when someone's heart stops) and go to the trauma area when someone is brought in.

It's a true gift from God to be allowed into someone's life when they're at a crisis point, to hear their story, and to have an opportunity to comfort them, even if only in a small way. I'm a retired professor in the engineering school at the

University of Colorado at Boulder and I'm used to having to solve complex, concrete, many-faceted problems. I'm used to having to come up with real solutions. Now, I've been blessed with an opportunity to focus on one person at a time and to be present for that person. There's no solution to find. I'm simply there to serve God's people.

Being a chaplain is amazingly rewarding, and I certainly get as much or more out of the visits than the patients and family members get. It is a spiritual event for me. But that's what Peter is telling us in our Bible passage today – love covers a multitude of sins. It cleanses us. It regenerates our souls. It brings us back into the arms of God.

I'd like to talk about a patient I visited recently at the hospital. There are a couple of things I look for on a patient's chart before I go visit them. I'm not a medical person, but I try to figure out just how sick they are. I generally don't talk about medical issues with patients, but talking to someone who is facing a life-threatening illness is very different than talking to someone who is recovering after having a rod placed in a broken leg.

I also look to see if there is a declared religion, as well; in Boulder, the most common religion is None.

And I look for occupation – in particular, whether it says “homeless”. I’m always more relaxed when I go into the room of a homeless person. They seem to always appreciate my visit.

In this case, the patient was a woman in the Oncology unit, three years into treatment for a cancer that was not responding to treatment, and the religion was None. The occupation was Homeless.

By the way, I’m making up some of the details of her story to protect her privacy.

I cleaned my hands with the sanitizer that is available outside every patient room. I knocked on her door, opened it slowly, and called out her name – which, by the way, I had no idea how to pronounce. She was sitting up in bed. She had long black hair. Next to her bed, on a small table, was a large backpack standing upright. And next to her in the bed were six or seven small, grubby stuffed animals.

She smiled broadly as I walked up to her bed. I said that my name was Buzz, that I was one of the chaplains, and that I was there to see how she was doing. She said Hello, Bud; she said it with a d, *Bud*, not with a double z as in my name, Buzz. Then she very politely told me how to pronounce her name. I did my

best to repeat it back to her and failed miserably. She smiled even more broadly and said, “*Bud*, what can I do for you?”

I’ll call her Jane, but that’s not her true name.

I noticed immediately that Jane seemed to be missing most or all of the teeth on one side of her mouth.

I sat down and talked to her. Often, it’s clumsy, sometimes impossible, to get a patient talking about their life. My goal is usually to listen to the person, and when they get to a painful point in their life story or in their telling of their medical journey, I gently try to get them to open up to me.

I did not have to prod Jane. She spoke freely - and in a very literate, educated fashion. I heard that she had been born on a small farm in Ireland, that she and her sister had moved to America together as very young women, and that they both had gotten married in California. I learned that her husband had turned out to be a brutal man. “He smashed my jaw,” she said, “so I had to run away”.

Jane told me that she had been advised to go to some place familiar to her, a place where she could see herself living, but where her husband had no connections. She had spent two days in the Boulder area on the way out from Ireland, and so she came here.

She could not find a job, though, and ended up homeless.

But Jane eventually found a job in Wyoming, taking care of adults with cognitive disabilities. She loved the job because, she said, it was a gift to serve others.

However, she was forced to quit that job when her sister called. Her sister's husband had been killed in a motorcycle accident. Jane's sister had a baby at the time and was beside herself with grief. Now, Jane was a woman who had suffered a terrible injury at the hands of a man who should have held her wellbeing and happiness as a primary goal in life. But she had finally established a life of her own. Now she was giving it all up to go back to California.

But Jane was only in her sister's home for a week before her sister suddenly decided that she would be okay, that she didn't need Jane's help anymore. In fact, the sister explained, Jane was no longer welcome in her home. When Jane explained that she had no home or job to go back to, her sister didn't care. It turned out that the sister decided that Jane, who was unemployed, homeless, and had a damaged face, was embarrassing to have around.

Jane went back to Boulder and never again found a home. She lived on the street for a while. Jane eventually found a semi-permanent place to live in a

shelter. Her life for a handful of years now had consisted of living in the shelter, with periodic stays in Boulder Community Hospital to be treated for a colon cancer that was refusing to be cured. But she had a home, she said with a smile, in that shelter. She constantly had to renegotiate with the folks who run the shelter to allow her to continue to stay, but it was a home.

The one thing she said to me at least three times was that most of the men on the street were good men who protected the women. She said that it was too bad that unlike the women on the street, it was hard for the men to find a long-term place to stay.

I'm going to get back to Jane in a moment.

There are two letters in the New Testament that are attributed to the Apostle Peter. Many scholars believe that the letter we are looking at today, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, was written to provide spiritual and practical support for people who were undergoing violent persecution. The author was writing to people in Asia Minor, which today is more or less modern Turkey. These churches were made up of gentiles, not Jews who had joined the Jesus movement. Those folks lived in the area around Jerusalem.

Both letters state clearly that they were written by Peter, an Apostle of Jesus. But Peter was a poor fisherman and yet the letters are written in very literate, cultivated Greek. It's also true that significant persecution against Christians didn't begin in this region until long after Peter would have been dead.

The two Peter letters also don't highlight the fact that Peter knew Jesus personally. To complicate things further, the Greek in the two letters is different and so the two letters appear to have different authors. And the second letter seems to imply that the age of the apostles has passed and was therefore written after Peter was dead. The net effect is that most biblical scholars do not believe that Peter personally wrote either of these letters.

So, we are left with a letter that we must accept at face value. We do need to remember a longstanding tenet of biblical scholarship: the Bible, in particular, the New Testament, was written during a time when documents were often attributed to people in order to honor them – not to trick future readers about who actually wrote the documents.

What matters for us today is that 1<sup>st</sup> Peter offers beautifully insightful advice on how a Christian can live a vibrant life dedicated to God even when

facing extreme challenges. One of the key lessons of this letter is that we should always trust God, even when things aren't going well.

This particular passage tells us to be proactive in our trust. We don't just sit around and think about how to show our love for God. We should get off the sofa and do something. We should serve others as a way of glorifying God and Jesus.

Looking more closely, this passage has a few different points in it. It tells us to love one another.

It tells us to serve one another with whatever gifts we have been given.

It also tells us that God must be glorified through Jesus Christ in the things we do to serve others.

We are to give all our energy when we serve – and we have a lot of energy to give, because the grace and the power of our God is behind us.

Still, we are left to wonder who wrote this letter. In it, the author mentions that he is in Babylon, which might have been a reference to the sinful, corrupt city of Rome. So, the author was perhaps in Rome. It's thought that perhaps the letter was written by a follower of Peter, and that in fact, the concern wasn't literal, physical persecution against the churches Asia Minor. Maybe the author was referring to life as a Christian in the Roman Empire or in any place where the



secular society around us persecutes us morally and teaches us not to serve others, but rather to only serve ourselves.

Here's how my visit with Jane ended. As our conversation wound down – and we talked for about an hour and a half – she asked if we could pray before I left. I do get this request from time to time. So, of course I said yes. She reached out with her hands. I took them. She closed her eyes and I closed mine. I was preparing myself to start praying –

... when she started praying: “God please guide and protect Bud as he continues with his ministry at this hospital.”

She continued on in this vein for a few minutes. Yes, she prayed for me instead of me praying for her. This is the only time a patient has prayed for me. But that's what Jane was all about - using whatever she had to serve others in the name of God.

Indeed, perhaps 1<sup>st</sup> Peter was talking about defying the selfish depravity of modern society. And yes, Jane - the woman whose true first name I could not pronounce and who knew me as Bud - used the gift she had to serve me, and she did so in the name of God. And she did so with all the grace and energy that God gave her. She didn't have much in life – to most of us, she had nothing. And she

had very little energy in her earthly body. But with all the incredible power that God had placed in her, she gave what she had.

One last thing. There is a very intriguing verse that comes just before the passage we read today from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. Before saying that we should love each other, the author says: *“We are coming to the end of all things, so be serious and keep your wits about you.”* The author is saying that the end of time is approaching. After this line, the author delivers the passage that we have read. Does this mean that we should serve each other with all that we have simply because we’re worried about facing God soon?

That’s not why Jane prayed for me. Indeed, for her, all things will end soon. She told me she was hoping to live to see the summer. You see, I thanked her for praying for me. I told her it was the most beautiful thing that any patient or family member had ever done for me. She told me I was welcome and that she prays for others because it is the best way to live a radiant life. She prayed for me for today, for the here-and-now – not to earn some reward from God.

I’d like to end with a prayer.

*God, you call upon us to love one another. You call upon us to serve with whatever gift we have. You call upon us to serve in your name and in the name of*

*Jesus Christ. And you remind us that when we give, we have within us an amazing strength given by you.*

*But we live in a world where we are under constant pressure to not just earn a living, but to succeed in a way that brings worldly rewards that others can see. Please help us to remember that we are unequal only in this world, that the day will come when all people are equal in all ways. Help us remember that the least successful, the least respected on this planet are often the ones who are the closest to you. Help us learn from those people among us. And help us to remember that there are many people who are suffering economically, but are suffering in silence. Some of us are not homeless, and are not visibly living in dire need, but are actually in need. Yet these people are often giving the most to others.*

*God, let us feel that incredible energy that you deliver to anyone who asks for it. Help us direct it outward, toward all people. Let us use whatever gifts we have to serve family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, anyone with whom we come into contact. And we thank you for the gift we will receive as a result of giving – radiant, vibrant lives filled with your grace and power. Amen.*

Please go out into the world today, this week, and for the rest of your lives, and serve others. Do it with whatever gift you have. And remember, even the most modest gift carries within it the incredible power of God's love and grace.