

Foxes and Birds

Luke 9:51-62

Heather Wood Davis

A few days ago,
I met some friends at the tennis courts
for a friendly meet up match.
While we were getting stuff out our cars,
a woman in small, old-ish silver SUV,
wanted to pull into a spot
right near us
and she seemed very insistent
on getting a particular parking space.
It was a little odd.

She didn't look like she was there for tennis,
or for walking
or for riding her bike on the trails
—all things you can do over at the City Park.
She was talking to herself
very animatedly in her car,
but she also seemed nervous
and almost agitated
that we were standing close
to the parking spot she clearly wanted.

She parked her car
but then didn't get out.
My friends and I continued talking,
putting our shoes on and what not
...and then several minutes later
she all the sudden
started to back her car
out of her coveted parking space!
Again, she cast a nervous glance
at us that still seemed agitated
and none of us could come up with a reason why.
Then one friend said to the rest of us,
"I think she was living out of her car.
It was packed full to the brim
with clothes, bags, and stuff."

This past February,
Catawba County had roughly 325 individuals
who are classified as homeless.



Casey McCall, who I worked with
on the board of the Salvation Army
several years ago,
was hired not long ago
by the Hickory Police Department
to act as a bridge between
the police department
and the homeless population.
McCall works to get people
who are experiencing homelessness
to the right resources and non-profits
and he estimates he's helped
about 45 people find housing solutions.¹

I can't imagine living out of my car.
Can you?
I cannot imagine
actually, being homeless for that matter either,
can you?



¹ <https://www.fox46.com/news/u-s/north-carolina/catawba-county/hickory/hickory-police-installing-anti-panhandling-signs-to-combat-homelessness/#:~:text=According%20to%20their%20last%20Point,cars%2C%20to%20trespassing%20and%20assault>

There is no doubt
that the pandemic has exacerbated
the issue of homelessness for many people.
Low living wages many people earn
coupled with increasing housing costs
and rising rent prices
exposed an ugly gap in country
of our lack of a good social network
that takes care of people.²

Women and children
are the fastest growing population
of homelessness in America.



In Miami, the Lotus Shelter,
houses over 1500 women, children, and youth.
It is the largest shelter
for women and children
in the country.
Including the services a traditional shelter provides,
there are several wrap around services
meant to aid the health and well being
of women and children.

Their vision, “...is that every woman, youth, and child
experiencing homelessness
will have the opportunity
to heal, learn and grow,

² <https://www.wbtv.com/2021/10/14/report-covid-19-pandemic-has-exacerbated-homelessness-housing-instability-charlotte-mecklenburg-county/>

build the foundation for a brighter future,
and blossom into
who they are truly meant to be.”³



Tenisha Johnson is an alumni of the Lotus Shelter.

Now an aspiring screen writer,
she was a college student
when she found herself without a place to live.
She writes, “Many people
have a false depiction
of what a homeless person looks like,
but in actuality have no idea.
At first, I felt like I didn't belong there
due to my own circumstances
...I realized I too
fall under the category
of seeing homelessness
with a false perspective.

“Homelessness to me,” she says,
“is not having a stable, reliable,
consistent, and safe place to live.
I didn't receive that stability
until 10 months later
transitioning out of the Lotus House Women's Shelter.
During the 10 months living at the L.H.
I was able to gain employment, housing,
and continue with my college education.
I love the saying "You grow through what you go through."
It was extremely difficult,
but I made it through.

³ <https://lotushouse.org/>

If you're currently experiencing homelessness
understand it doesn't have a face
and you too deserve to have stability and peace.”⁴



Isn't it so true, what Tenisha Johnson says,
how most of us
have a false sense
of what homelessness is?
I think it is safe to say
we all have our own implicit biases
about what would cause a person
to become homeless.
But usually, we never know
the whole story.
We are good at making judgments
about other people's lives
and how they are run,
but rarely can we pinpoint
where things all when downhill.
Many of us have a false depiction
of what homelessness is....

“Foxes have holes,
and birds of the air have nests;
but the Son of Man
has nowhere to lay his head.”



Meet the face of homelessness:
the Son of Man,

⁴ <https://lotushouse.org/beautifuljourneyofalumni/>

the Son of God,
the savior of the world.

Now some of you will be quick to say,
Heather that's not exactly
what he meant.

But what if that **is** exactly
what he meant?

Because in Jesus

there seems intentional refusal,
a refusal to marry himself
to any one place,
to put down roots with a family
as would have been the cultural norm;

because in Jesus
there is a refusal
of material hording of possessions

—whether Christ is telling us
not store up treasures on earth
or to sell everything we have
and give it to the poor—
these things indicate he wasn't being facetious

—in his life,
Jesus moved from place to place
and lived on the hospitality of others.

Hospitality was dictated by his Jewish faith.

Throughout the Old Testament,
hospitality is a pillar
on which a community
would stand or fall.

Think of the destruction Sodom and Gomorrah
in of their intended violence on
those whom Lot was offering hospitality.

Or the wickedness
pointed out again and again by the prophets
when God's people ignored
the poor, widowed and orphaned

—in essence when God’s people
ignored or took advantage of
those without
‘a stable, reliable, consistent safe place to live.’

By this time in the gospel of Luke
we have learned something about his mission
—he has come to the point of no return.
The NRSV translates the beginning of this passage,
“when the days drew near
for him to be taken up,”
but Luke’s intent is more overt
and should be translated as
“when the days were fulfilled
for him to be taken up...”⁵
he turned his face to go to Jerusalem.
You see he’s headed to the end.
Language of fulfillment
carries a weight that
this moment is critical.
Yes, there is more to come
—more stories, more travels, more parables,
but Jesus’s face, his resolution,
his destiny has him headed to Jerusalem,
where he says in Matthew,
[Jerusalem is] the city
that kills the prophets
and stones God’s messengers.⁶

To get to Jerusalem
Jesus decides to go the non-direct route,
he and the disciples
travel through Samaritan territory
hoping for hospitality.
Turns out they aren’t well received.
Jews and Samaritans we know,

⁵ James W. Thompson, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 3* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) Luke 9:51-62 pg. 191

⁶ Mt. 23:37, NRSV

didn't get along.
Yet knowing this
Jesus sends the disciples ahead of him,
to prepare for what is coming.
That doesn't happen.
The Samaritans don't receive Jesus
—likely because his face
was set elsewhere.
This shouldn't be shocking.
There are times Christ
wants to make a home and isn't welcomed.
There are times
when Christ isn't received.



Years ago,
on a Jr. High mission trip to Kermit, WV
we did the most un-Presbyterian thing
I think I have ever done.
We were told to go door to door
and evangelize.
We were supposed to hand out pamphlets
to tell people about Jesus,
and this little country church,
and the community Bible School cookout
we were going to help with
the following Thursday and Friday evenings.
Let me paint a picture...



of a bunch of energetic middle schoolers

riding in the back
of Robb Lackey's pick-up truck
down the dirt roads
of back country West Virginia.



I can surmise the whole trip
—the door to door and the community VBS by saying,
we weren't received!



How many times (*just like the Samaritans*)
do you suppose Christ is in our midst
and because He isn't what we expect,
or when He doesn't turn out the way we want
—how many times
do you suppose we may not
have received the Christ?

There are times and people and places
where Christ isn't welcomed.

But looking at what Jesus teaches,
this doesn't mean we call down fire from heaven.
As disciples, we learn from Christ that we don't condemn
or react violently
or shove our God and our ideas about God
down anyone's throat.

When Jesus isn't received
he simply says,
shake the dust off your feet
and move on.

Foxes have holes,
and the birds of the air have nests,
but the Son of Man
has nowhere to lay his head.

What is so interesting about all this
is the picture it paints for us; that,
“God incarnate is essentially homeless
apart from the hospitality of others.”⁷
To say it another way,
without hospitality, God incarnate,
God in the flesh has no home.
Without the welcome and invitation
of space that is stable, reliable and consistent,
Christ is homeless.

God incarnate, **Jesus**
—the walking, talking,
loving, teaching, saving form of God
is homeless without someone to invite him in.
He is homeless
without the hospitality
of someone to receive him.

Now the sermon is sounding a tad Baptist, isn't?

But this isn't an alter call;
this is a reminder that you,
and you,
and you,
are to be the home of God.
The house of the Lord
is full of God's people
who are the walking, talking,
loving, teaching and the ones who point
to one who is saving

⁷ Elaine A Heath, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 3* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) Luke 9:51-62
pg. 192

because God already dwells in you.

Some of the last words
we read in scripture
in the book of Revelation say,
“See the home of God is among mortals.
God will dwell with them,
they will be the people of God,
and God’s very self will be with them.”⁸

When Christ makes his home in you,
your priorities will align with his.
His way is hard,
and he knows that.
His path involves suffering,
he knows that.
His mission ends in death,
he knows that.

But his face is set
and his determination to follow God’s will
is unshakable
even in knowing what will meet him
as his face is set to Jerusalem.

So, he is not precious
about the cost of disciple when asked.

When our hearts
are as close to Christ’s heart as they can be
we too find our will
aligned with God’s will.

Which points to the fact
that as those who follow Christ,
we will be called to journey
with the one who traveled to places
where he knew he wouldn’t be received,
but goes nonetheless.

⁸ Rev. 21:3a, NRSV

Foxes have holes.
Birds of the air have nests,
but Son of man has no place to lay his head.

Unless it is in you.
The hospitality, the home you offer Christ
 ss the hospitality and home you offer the world.
 Foxes have holes
 but Christ has you.
 Birds of the air have nests,
 but Jesus makes his home in you.
 Amen.