

From the October 4, 2009 Issue

Come, Lord Jesus

As I write this it is eviction day in my neighborhood: the last day of the month. Some folks will get to spend one more night, tonight, and then they have to be out tomorrow - the first of the month. As I was bringing my kids home from school I saw all of someone's worldly possessions sitting on the curb in front of the old, run-down house they had been renting.

In case you've never been evicted, or in case you live in a neighborhood where the eviction of tenants is not a routine event, you might be surprised to know that this is what happens: If the person has not vacated the premises by the appointed time then all their stuff is taken out of the house (or apartment) and set on the side of the street.

I haven't checked the statistics for my neighborhood or my city, but it seems like there have been more of these public evictions this year. Recessions always hurt those in the lower economic classes harder than those in the middle and upper classes. As unemployment goes up and credit becomes tighter those with the fewest job skills, the lowest pay, and the least money in the bank are the first to feel the crunch, and they feel it more strongly than others.

A friend visited me here in Nashville a few years back and after spending some time downtown he said, "You guys have a real homelessness problem here!" My reply was simple: "Actually, we have a mental healthcare problem here."

I think it's the same almost everywhere in America. It's not so much that people won't work, or that there's not enough cheap housing. The problem is that people are psychotic, neurotic, clinically depressed, schizophrenic, and have no idea how to manage the pain, rage, and sadness in which they're drowning.

Over the years they've learned coping mechanisms: lying, stealing, sex, alcohol, and drugs, to try to dull the pain and escape the insanity. Of course those things only work for a little while and when they stop working the result is estrangement from family, friends, and church, then eviction, and then homelessness.

By and large I find that people want to help. The folks in my congregation have dug into their own pockets, and into the church's bank account, to help again and again. As a society we fund shelters, government housing, food stamps, unemployment benefits, and a host of other programs.

Can you imagine how bad the situation would be if we as a society weren't trying to help? Just visit a nation without the resources and/or political will to take care of its poorest people. What you see there are children begging on the street and vast shanty-towns of the desperately poor living in cardboard and sheet metal shacks. American cities could easily look just like that if it weren't for private and public programs that try to help.

And now, here's my point in all this: We all have our role to play in participating in Jesus' redemption and restoration of this mess. Some of us earn big bucks so we will have big bucks to give away. Some of us have been gifted to heal mental health problems. Some of us keep order in the midst of the chaos by serving in the police force. Some of us mold young minds in schools to try and break the cycle. Some of us show love to the unloved by hugging them and praying for them at

church.

And some of us are trying to revolutionize the very nature of humanity's perception of reality. That's where *The Adopted Life* comes in. We are one small set of shoulders among the thousands that have set themselves against the wheel of history and are trying to turn it. The world needs a better theology (God-knowledge) than the one it has inherited from previous generations. The world needs a knowledge of God rooted in the Trinity, in Jesus, and in humanity's adoption into the Trinity through the flesh and blood of Jesus.

We are trying to play our part in changing the very course of history itself, so that in the next generation there will be even more people who know who Jesus really is and who humanity really is in him. And then there will be even more in the generation after that, and even more in the generation after that, and so on, for centuries to come, until the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth as the waters cover the sea.

I know, I know, some of you are saying "Well, that won't happen until Christ returns."

Can you imagine if Paul and the other apostles had adopted that attitude 2,000 years ago? I can hear them now: "Oh, Christ will be back in a few years, so no need to preach the good news about him or try to change the world one person at a time." In spite of all the problems we face, the world is still a better place today than it was in the days of the apostles, and it is a better place because they set out from Jerusalem with the good news of Jesus and a dream to change the world.

I don't know when Christ will return. But I do know that the good news of humanity's adoption in Christ is the solution to the problems we are facing. It was the solution two millennia ago, it's the solution today, and it will be the solution even when the Kingdom comes in all its fullness.

So my prayer is the same as that of the first Christians: "Come, Lord Jesus." May the knowledge of who you are, and who humanity is in you, come now in the lives of all those being evicted today. May it come in the lives of my children and grand-children and great grand-children. And yes, Lord, come back at the end of the age.

~ Jonathan Stepp