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Did I just walk past hungry Jesus?

I couldn't sleep. Haunted by the images. Did I just fail my test to be a Good Samaritan? Did I just step over hungry Jesus? Did I just turn and walk away from hungry Jesus? (Read Matthew 25:31-46) Ellen and I want to help. We know we can't help them all.

It started when I was a 20 something pastor in my first church. Born and raised in a rural small town setting, graduating from a high school class of only seventy students I was not prepared for the city. A friend in our church invited me into Boston to the hallowed grounds of Fenway Park for a Red Sox game. We drove to Braintree, took the Red Line into the city, and exited the many stairs from the graffiti darkened and foul smelling subway to the bright streets of the city. But half way up anticipating the excitement of major league baseball, I turned a corner on a stairwell and saw what

appeared to be a homeless man passed out in a drunken stupor just lying there. The rush of the crowd around us in a hurry to find their seats carried us along. I found myself stepping over this man and wondering “Did I just fail my test to be a Good Samaritan?” I can’t remember anything at all about that game. I remember everything about the moment when I stepped over that man on the subway stairwell.

Ellen and I have seen hunger and even starvation before in places like Haiti and Ethiopia. We would complete our ministry trips to these countries, return to the airport for our flights back to the comforts and blessings of the USA. So often those flights home would be rather silent as we tried to process the inequity and injustice of the suffering we left behind and the blessings we were returning to.

Riveting scenes are recreating themselves here in Chiang Mai in our local version of this tragic global pandemic. We take twice daily three mile prayer walks through this city we love and serve. More and more of these good and gracious people are becoming desperate in their hunger. More than once a day as we walk the streets of the city we now call home, we are approached by hungry people asking for help. A father carrying a little boy. Two gaunt men limping across the bridge. A man who doesn’t even get up off the sidewalk as he gestures for help. They see us, obviously foreigners with the means to live as guests in their city. They are hungry. Their family is hungry. Their desperation grows with each day. There are more persons than we alone can help. But did I just step over hungry Jesus? Did I just turn and walk away from hungry Jesus?

We are not heroes in any way. There are so many who make much greater sacrifices than we ever will and give more generously than we ever will. But we have embraced God’s clear calling for us to live simply. We live without debt trying to earn all we can, to save all we can, to give all we can (John Wesley). We tithe and give above and beyond as we are able.

...But sometimes sleep still betrays us as images of neighbors in need cry out.

