Breakfast with Samuel.
The importance of making time for people God sends our way.
Dear Wendy,

I have been reading a small book for the past three weeks that has been a blessing to me. It was written by a rabbi named Harold S. Kushner. Perhaps you have heard of it: The Lord Is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of The Twenty Third Psalm.

The book takes each line of Psalm 23 and spends a good deal of time delving into the meaning of each thought in that beautiful passage of Scripture. It is a reflective psalm that reminds us that God is ever present with us, no matter what happens to us. God cares. God knows what is taking place in our lives, and God is present, even when we feel like we are alone. And God sends people into our lives to remind us that we are here to help each other. "He restores my soul."

"The basic affirmation of personal worth and being that occurs in Christian and Jewish monotheism is grounded in a certain understanding of the relationship between God and human beings called grace. This relationship is rooted in the creation of human beings, but it is more than the esteem a creator might have toward the object of creation, more than familial relationship of being created in the divine image and partaking in the divine nature, more than the essential givens of our humanness.

The thoroughgoing assurance of God's affirmation of our worth comes through an all-inclusive love called grace. Grace is the acceptance and affirmation of the person before and independent of any action a person can take in the world. Grace affirms that each human being is irreducibly valuable--nothing done or not done can increase or decrease the worth given in the love of God.

It is possible for humans to refuse the call of God toward wholeness, to choose to live outside the healing relationships of mutual love, but even this rejection takes place within the context of grace. The divine yes is a constant invitation to the renewal of life and to the recovery of integrity. God is for us. This most elemental of convictions of Judaism and Christianity undergirds all healing and liberation." --Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures, David W. Augusburger, p. 140.

All of this brings me to my story: "Breakfast with Samuel."

When you live and work in New York City, you must be always aware that there are people in need of your time, many of whom have not been shown love in a very long time, people who are walking through the valley. God sends these people to us, and we must be ready to give them of our time. This time is not just given to, or for, them; God uses people in need so we can practice being kind, in taking time for others. And when we do so, God knows that we can grow. If you get too busy for people in need, then what is the point of all the preaching, the teaching, and the singing in church?

Last Saturday morning, as I stepped out of my car, I had my keys in hand to open the church door. My mind was filled with the things that I had to take care of that morning. As I found the front-door key, I heard a man call out to me, "Happy morning to you." I returned the greeting, as he told me that he was on his way to get some food at a nearby shelter. He informed me that the shelter would not be serving lunch until around 11:45 a.m. on the East Side of Manhattan.

I told him to come inside, and that he could come into my office, relax, get warm, and rest. He was unsure of the offer, and asked me several times, "Are you sure it would be okay if I came into the church? After all, I am Jewish." I told him that being Jewish was a good thing, since Jesus Christ was also Jewish. He smiled and asked me again, "Are you sure I will be welcome?" After a few more requests to come in, he finally made his way into my office, placed his backpack on the floor, and explained to me that he would shake my hand but his was very dirty.
I told him that my hands had a lot of germs on them so it would be best if I didn't shake his hand. I was just recovering from a virus and I didn't want to give him my germs. It seems we both needed cleansing. We sat down together and I asked if he was hungry. He said yes, and I offered him some breakfast. He said he would like that and wondered if he could wash his hands. He then left the room to wash up, and when he returned, my wife, Marlene, made him a cup of hot chocolate and several buttered rolls. He was surprised that the breakfast was ready for him and asked if it would be all right if he ate the meal that was prepared for him. I reassured him once again that he should simply relax and enjoy the simple meal, and he was very grateful. We bantered together like old friends.

His name was Samuel, and he stayed with us the rest of the day, enjoying the worship service, the vegetarian lunch that we have each Saturday afternoon, and the afternoon seminar given by a visiting Italian minister from Europe, Paolo Beninni. He felt right at home. Isn't that what church is all about? Samuel was a blessing to me that morning. His greeting right outside the front door of our church made me smile, and focused my rush-and-get-it-done-now day in a much-needed new direction.

The ministry is filled with all sorts of things to do, forms to fill out, letters to write, and sermons to preach. In some cases, even preaching a sermon is fraught with nervous tension, since after you put your thoughts out there, you can count on someone finding something you said, or the way you said it, offensive in some way.

That is what was so enjoyable about spending some time and having breakfast with Samuel. He simply enjoyed our time together. He made me stop my busy work to enjoy his company, to share in some good conversation. After my sermon, he gave me some encouragement, and indicated to me how wonderful it was to be in church that day. I thank God for sending Samuel to me, to give me some much-needed love.

Samuel should only know what a blessing it was for me to have him sit with me from the moment I entered my office and have him refocus my mind on the importance of taking time for others. God used Samuel that day, and I am very grateful.

Each one of us can benefit from taking time out of our busy life, or what we may think is our busy life, to simply rest with those whom God sends to minister to us in ways that we never planned. We all need to learn to live in the Now of God's leading.

It might even mean enjoying a breakfast with someone like Samuel, whom I didn't even know I was going to have breakfast with that morning. May God fill our calendars with the joy of meeting people whom He sends our way each day.

If you are looking for a church home, or some new friends who will take the time to listen and pray for you, I encourage you to consider joining us for worship or a small-group study. I can be reached at reachnyc.romeo@gmail.com to set something up, and we can plan on meeting together.

May God bless you with peace and good health.

Best regards,

Tony Romeo, Coordinator / REACH-NYC
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