

Morning by Morning New Mercies I See

Deb Downey

Recently we sang Great is Thy Faithfulness, written by Thomas Chisholm, and I was drawn to these words: *morning by morning new mercies I see*.

In this time of pandemic, I find myself looking for good news – for mercies. And in the heat of summer I find myself enjoying the mornings especially -- the coolness and birdsong are small mercies.

I went looking for other thoughts about that line from the song, and found the Episcopal Rev. Dr. Timothy Mulder's reflection. He writes, "If we look, we can see. Faith is mostly about choosing to look for God. It's about *practicing* looking for God and God's mercies."

He continues, "Seeing God's mercy every day shapes the way we move through the day. It shapes how we look at and see other people." That makes sense to me. If I am on the lookout for God's relentless love, also known as mercies, I feel safer and bring a quality of acceptance to my relationships. I see other people less as interruptions and more as brothers and sisters in God.

And sometimes those other people can show me what mercy looks like. I remember when I was in fifth grade. We lived in a small southern Missouri town, and all of us kids rode the bus to the nearby larger town to go to school. On the way there the school bus stopped a couple of places to pick up more students. One of those was in front of a shack which was the most rundown I'd ever seen. Each morning six kids from that family got on the bus. Their clothes were dirty, they were usually dirty, and I really didn't know what to think. Someone told me those kids' dad was a mean drunk. The kids just sat quietly on the bus. Every time we pulled up to their house and I saw their thin bodies I felt bad.

One morning the littlest child, a girl, fell as she was running to the bus. She managed to get up and get on, but she was sobbing. Her big brother who was as tall as a man called her over. He lifted her onto his lap, and I watched as he said comforting words and rocked her. Why am I talking about this 48 years later? Because it opened at least two possibilities to me, and I don't know which was more surprising – that a man could exhibit nurturing tenderness or that someone who was suffering could be so compassionate.

Serious illness, as we know, can also change how we *see*. A blog writer I came across spoke about having cancer in his forties. He said before the tumor he viewed life with a sort of telescopic lens – focused on the details. He thought about things like *when would he ever have time to stain the deck?* After his diagnosis his vision shifted to a wide angle lens – with thoughts like *how could he improve the relationships in his life?*

Frequently I view the world through social media. Being a person who wants to love my neighbor has given me pause in this context. There’s always some clever meme, and frequently the humor is at someone’s or a group of people’s expense. A lens I’ve chosen to use is to discern whether a post is a person telling their story or whether it’s just another clever judgmental slam.

The other day a friend sent me a post. (Photo from Facebook)

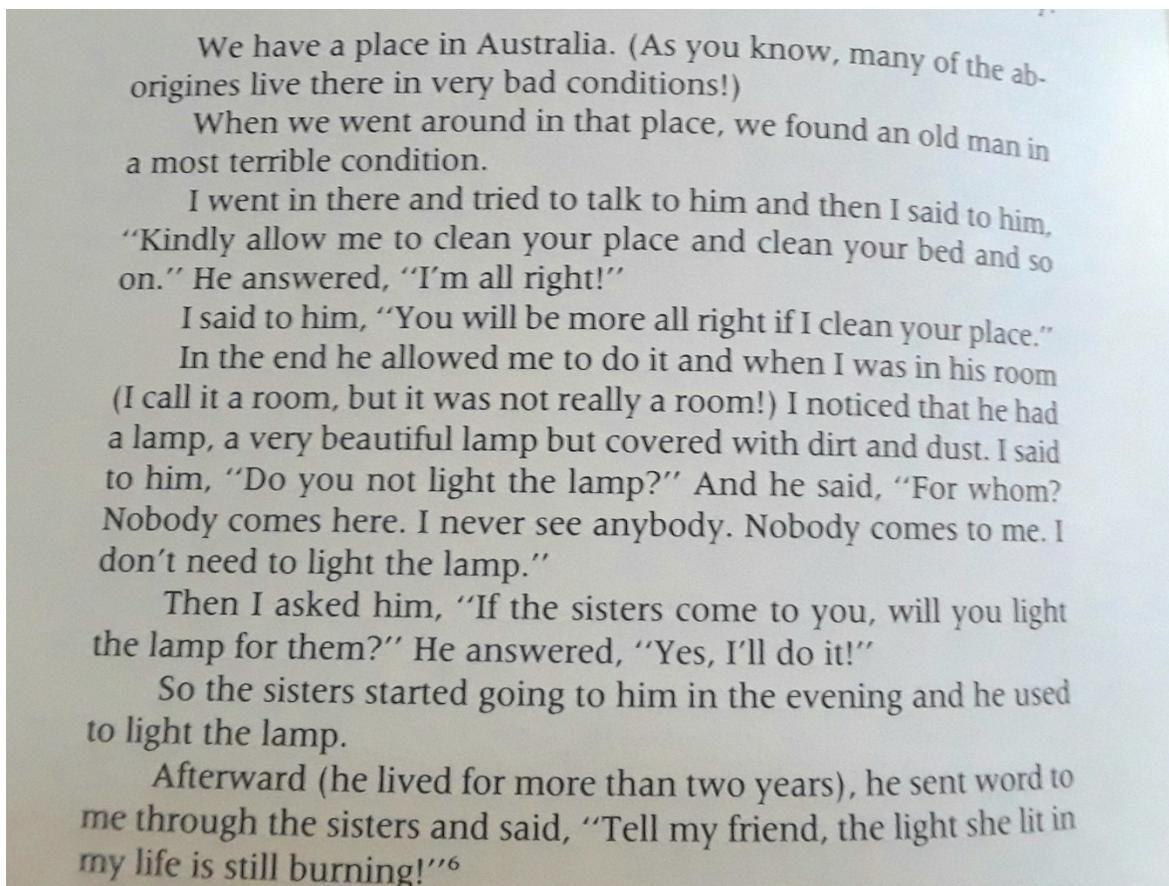


That’s Robert Hartwell, and I had no idea who he was. (He’s a Broadway actor.) Here’s what he wrote below the photo: *3 weeks ago I found this house online. I said “this is my house”. I called the seller and was told it was a cash only offer and that “I’m sure that takes you off the table”. Don’t you ever underestimate a hard working black man. I saw the house last week and when I walked in I knew I was home. The house was built in 1820 for the Russell family who owned the cotton mill in town. Slavery was still legal. When the agent asked me why I wanted such a large house I said it was “a generational move”. I know this house is bigger than me. I wish I could’ve told my ancestors when they were breaking their back in 1820 to build this house that 200 years*

later a free gay black man was going to own it and fill it with love and find a way to say their name even when 200 years later they still thought I would be “off the table”. We are building our own tables. I’ve never been prouder to be a black man. Come to my White House any time. I can’t wait to have you! Glory to God in the highest. I’m a homeowner.

Dr. Robert J. Wicks, a psychologist, wrote *Living Simply in an Anxious World* in 1988. I first saw it on Tuesday when my friend Sue gave it to me. He writes, “With love we begin to see our entire day, and the whole array of interactions that are possible, as *opportunity*. No longer is service to God compartmentalized, nor need it be sharply visible. Instead, it is all service, all love, all a time for a form of community life.”

I want to leave you with a final story from the book. It’s a story by Mother Teresa of Calcutta:



We have a place in Australia. (As you know, many of the aborigines live there in very bad conditions!)

When we went around in that place, we found an old man in a most terrible condition.

I went in there and tried to talk to him and then I said to him, “Kindly allow me to clean your place and clean your bed and so on.” He answered, “I’m all right!”

I said to him, “You will be more all right if I clean your place.”

In the end he allowed me to do it and when I was in his room (I call it a room, but it was not really a room!) I noticed that he had a lamp, a very beautiful lamp but covered with dirt and dust. I said to him, “Do you not light the lamp?” And he said, “For whom? Nobody comes here. I never see anybody. Nobody comes to me. I don’t need to light the lamp.”

Then I asked him, “If the sisters come to you, will you light the lamp for them?” He answered, “Yes, I’ll do it!”

So the sisters started going to him in the evening and he used to light the lamp.

Afterward (he lived for more than two years), he sent word to me through the sisters and said, “Tell my friend, the light she lit in my life is still burning!”⁶