

What Are You Doing?



Recently I have written reflections entitled, “Who are you?” and “Where are you?” Now I wish to turn to possible activities linked to who and where we are, by asking “What are you doing?” In other words, how can we today as God’s loved children share, wherever we are, God’s love in relationships with others through our thoughts, words and actions?

The above photo, taken in our backyard, may seem to be unrelated to the theme of this leaflet, but there are connections. The wattle trees assist the gum tree growing close to them, by preventing the bare soil around its base from erosion, and fixing nitrogen in the soil. The gum tree, on the other hand, can shelter and protect the wattles during storms. They all have relationships in which they can help each other. Further, these trees, in their own particular ways, also provide shelter and/or food for birds.

‘Thoughts’ may seem out of place when discussing actions, yet often we say or do things in response to decisions we make in our minds. At present we are being told of the horrific plight of the people living in Ukraine and Gaza. We can try to avoid thinking about it, or choose to act by praying for peace and

justice in those areas. Closer to home, perhaps we have noticed someone missing at church services. We may pray, consider what else we can do, and then phone or visit the person. But sometimes we must make our decisions immediately as to how we are to show love to another.

As Christians, we are called to love others as Jesus loves us, sharing God's love with them, but this call to love another can happen when we do not want to be interrupted. Also, we may know the person who has come to us with a request, and do not want to help them, for various reasons. Do we stop and do what we can to assist them, or do we explain we are busy, and direct them elsewhere?

Frequently Jesus showed acceptance and love for others, especially those socially rejected. In Mark 5:25-34, for example, we are told about a woman in a large crowd who had suffered from haemorrhages for 12 years. She decided to do a desperate and faith driven action. It was to touch Jesus' clothing to receive healing. Secretly she did so, and was healed. Jesus was on his way to help someone else, but immediately stopped, turned around, and asked who touched him. The woman was frightened because her sickness rendered her 'unclean' and she was forbidden to touch others, but she went to him, fell down, and told him the 'whole truth'. What was her 'whole truth'? Surely it involved her pain, isolation and suffering. Jesus listened to her and then called her, "Daughter". She became to him an accepted family member. He gave her new life through healing, social inclusion and peace. By her faith, she witnessed publicly to his love and healing power, even through his clothing!

Sometimes we may find ourselves drawn into a conversation with another person, whose attitudes and beliefs are different from our own. Perhaps we try to cut short such a conversation, or we engage in it, not to dominate it or disrespect the opinions of another, but to learn how they see and understand an event from their particular perspective. It may be a viewpoint that can enrich our own view or even our life.

In conversations, Jesus' love and respect for people is shown by the way he not only asked questions but allowed people to respond to him as they wished, not just to say what they might have thought was culturally expected. An example of this is in John 4:5-42, when Jesus began a conversation with a Samaritan woman he met at a well, by asking her for a drink. He needed help because he

had no container with which to obtain water from the well. She replied by first asking him, why he was speaking to her and requesting a drink? (As a Rabbi, a Jew and a man in a public place, Jesus should have ignored her.) Jesus answered her, and the conversation continued. By the end of this encounter, both Jesus and the woman were helped and served by each other, and so were many other people. Jesus and his disciples spent two days at the woman's village, receiving hospitality and talking with the Samaritans who lived there (Jesus no doubt had plenty of water to drink!). The Samaritan woman, who had been an outsider in the village because of her immoral failed relationships, encouraged many of her neighbours to meet Jesus. They later believed that he was, "indeed the Saviour of the World", and were no doubt grateful to her.

As well as behaving in loving ways towards other people, our relationships with nature, God's creation of animals, trees, plants, the earth and sea etc., can also become one of love, appreciation and care. We are to serve nature, which in turn maintains our lives and serves us in so many ways. God's loving presence is surely in such relationships.

When sharing God's love with others, we can treat them as either friends or strangers, but do we look at them also as family, people loved and created by God? When people repel us or speak roughly to us, do we try to avoid them, or do we still try to love, serve and help them, and also be grateful when we experience Christ's love through them?

*Sister Helen CSC
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