

The Rev. Heidi Truax

When I was in Tegucigalpa I met a memorable character named Louis. Louis is quite elderly by Honduran standards. He is in his seventies. Despite the dangers and difficulties, Louis is a homeless beggar. I don’t know how he has survived all this time on the streets, carrying all his worldly possessions with him in a bundle tied with rope. He carries his bundle on his back. He is bent over from the years, and his walk is sort of a slow shuffle.

Louis is also afflicted with mental illness of some kind which keeps him from carrying on a conversation of more than two or three sentences that makes any sense. But despite that we have talked. He has told me about being robbed of his few lempiras (that’s the money of Honduras). One Sunday he showed me a terrible knot on his head which he said he received from some hooligans who hit him with a stick and took all his money.

The most dangerous thing of all is how Louis makes his money. I saw him one day as I was driving, standing in traffic at an intersection begging from people in the cars stopped at the red light. This is a common occurrence in Tegucigalpa, and there are beggars who have their intersections staked out. As I drove away from the intersection and looked in my rearview mirror, I was amazed that no one hit Louis, although I suspect that many times he has been hit by mirrors, or worse, as people carelessly speed away from the intersection. Louis is nothing if not tough.

He has been offered help to go to a shelter or home for elderly, but so far he has refused.

So, it is all the more amazing that rain or shine, in the heat and in a cold downpour, Louis comes to church every Sunday dressed in his one, tattered, dirty and wrinkled suit with a shirt that must have been white at some point and he even sports a dingy tie. Every Sunday Louis is there. He comes to the English language service because he says he has lived in Jamaica and

England, and that English is his native language. He always sits at the rear of the church, which is a blessing to the rest of the congregation because he's pretty smelly, poor guy.

He has a regular self-appointed duty in the service too. He comes up front at the offertory to receive the basket and collect the offering. When I saw him doing this the first few Sundays I was skeptical about Louis. Wondering about this I surreptitiously watched him for several weeks. He went to one side of the church with his basket, and then he went and held out the basket to the other side. As he walked back to the rear of the church I saw him put his hand in his pocket. I thought, well, the poor guy needs it I'm sure but, really, the church does too. He turned around at the back of the church, pulled his hand out of his pocket and dropped some crumpled lempira notes into the basket. The doxology began and he started his slow shuffle up to the front of the church with the basket. When I received the basket from him I realized I was absolutely wrong. I felt ashamed to be thinking the worst of him. Louis **gives** to the church every week. He just wants to be part of the community like the rest of us who participate in the service. He always takes communion, shares in the passing of the peace with those who are willing to walk back to shake his hand.

Louis knows what is truly important. No matter what has happened to him on the streets in the preceding week, he is always at church on Sunday morning. It may be pouring rain, which it does every day in Honduras in the rainy season, but Louis is still there....soaking wet. He had an umbrella, but it was stolen from him. Others will give him a new umbrella, and it will be stolen in time too.

When I read the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, I think about the fact that Ruth and Naomi together knew what was most important in their lives. For Ruth, it was staying with a wise woman whom she respected and had grown to love, and who needed her. For Naomi it was going back to Israel to be with her people, and although she tried to encourage her daughter-in-law to stay behind in Moab, Ruth was firm. Ruth knew what she needed and wanted to do.

Now the Book of Ruth is a wonderful story. It takes less than an hour to read the whole thing. I encourage you to read the Book of Ruth. Or if you have read it, you may not have read it recently. Read it again. I am willing to bet that you will find some new insights there that you hadn't gleaned the last time you read it. And I'm not a betting woman!

I want to talk to you about what is important to us as a congregation. I want to tell you what my hopes for Trinity are – in essence, what is important to me. And I will ask all of you in the weeks to come: What is important to you here at Trinity Church?

First a little background. When I was a young mother living in Sharon with my husband and four children; raising a family and working with Philip in our computer business, I began to feel really overwhelmed. I had been taught in my youth that what was really important was self-sufficiency, pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps. In my family you didn't talk about what was troubling you, you just got to work and got it done. My mother told me to not depend on anyone because everyone in life that you depend on will let you down. My poor mom. I pray that Jesus has now straightened her out on that score now that she is in heaven.

So, I came from a background where we did not ask for help. We just toughed it out. So, when things got difficult for me in my life as a mother and business owner I just grit my teeth and did my best to keep maintaining the image as a perfect mother and a perfect computer store manager. It never, and I mean NEVER occurred to me to go and speak to the priest at my church about all of this. In my experience this is not what you do. And that certainly was not what church was for. What I thought church was for was putting on my nicest clothes, putting a smile on my face, pretending that everything was fine, while at the same time praying to God to please, please help me with the burdens I was carrying.

Eventually I did ask for help, and that's a story for a different day, but the point I want to make here is that what I finally figured out: What I thought was important; independence and self-sufficiency, wasn't important, and in fact was a stumbling block to my faith, to my ability to

have a true friendship with anyone, and my ability to ask for, and receive, the blessings that God has in mind for us all.

The reason God wants us to come together week by week in Church is not just to compare our Sunday dresses, or suits, and smile and just be cordial to each other. God sent Jesus to us to tell us that the real reason we are meant to come together to worship God in Jesus Christ is to help each other, lift each other up, catch each other's tears at times and laugh at each others' stories and be fed spiritual food to strengthen and heal us. We come to the altar to share the bread and the cup to be joined to each other and to Jesus through our shared meal. That is important.

Church is also, at least here at Trinity, a place to hear beautiful music (which I got a special sampling of yesterday afternoon at the Crescendo concert to honor EMTs and fire squads to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude). Through music we can transcend our daily troubles and lift to God our prayers and praises through the beauty of his own gift to us, music. That is important too.

Trinity church should be a place where we can bring our whole selves, our souls and bodies as we say in the Rite one Eucharistic prayer. Church should be a place of refuge when you are suffering or grieving, a place of fellowship and laughter when things are going well. And, most importantly, it should be a place of openness and honesty.

So, what is important to you?

JESUS IN THE HEBREWS PRIEST THING.

Over the next few months I will be visiting every family in the church. Some of you have already received phone calls and visits from me. I am not doing this in any particular order, so you needn't think that if your name begins with W you will be last. I hope you will tell me when I visit what is important to you, both about Trinity church and in your life.

The scribes in our reading from the Gospel of Mark this morning think they know what is important too. The customs of their long standing tradition makes them think that their way of doing things must be right because that's the way they have always done it.

Jesus came to tell the truth about what was really important, and so he pointed out the widow who came and put in two small copper coins. He brought her to the attention of the disciples so that they could see and learn what was important too.

I feel as though God brought me up short, and taught me a lesson when I saw what I thought was Louis stealing from the offering plate, but was, in fact God's true servant, praising God with his presence and his 2 lempiras (which is worth about 10 cents).

Please pray with me in silence for a few moments and ask for God's presence and revelation in your heart of what is truly important.

The widow in the story Jesus tells us this morning knew what was important to her. It wasn't appearances. She did not need to show off for anyone. It was not hoarding her money. She did not think that putting money aside was as important as putting it in the offering box at the Temple.