

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
Job 38:1, 8-11
Psalm 107: 23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31
2 Corinthians 5:14-17
Mark 4:35-41
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St Paul is doing a bit of fund-raising in our second reading. He's taking up a collection among the Corinthians, for the Church back in Jerusalem. Paul's appeal still rings true. He reminds the Corinthians that, in a sense, Jesus, God's Son, made himself poor, so that they could be made rich with the gift of salvation. Now, in imitation of their Savior, they should share their material surplus with others. Then, one day, when they are in need, those others, will give back to them, so that no one will be impoverished, and a kind of balance will be achieved.

This sounds very much like the reasoning behind the credit union movement in America, in which workers in a particular trade, or employees of a particular company pool their savings, so that low interest loans are available to everyone. In order for the idea to work, it requires a group identity among the people involved. And it requires a degree of trust. The feeling of identity clearly exists among, say teachers, or electrical workers. The trick for us Christians is to extend Paul's idea to embrace people on another continent who are hungry, or people whom we will never meet who are suffering from some disease for which a cure is sought.

One problem is that the "payback" is likely to be less tangible. The next time there is a financial crisis in the U.S., we are unlikely to receive disaster relief from Burundi or Eritrea. But we will all benefit from living in

a world in which human beings have compassion for one another.

A bigger obstacle is the decay of the sense of fellow feeling in our culture. For a variety of reasons, we tend these days to regard other people not as “one of us,” but rather as threats to our security and comfort. We are afflicted by an increasing sense of isolation. Our parents and grandparents might have spent their evenings in a village pub, or at the local cinema. People today are more likely to drink alone in their rooms while binging on Netflix. Most households used to be made up of several people of two or three generations. Now, in the United States, twenty-seven percent of households consist of one person.

It is in this context that we have to try to make St. Paul’s words live. The woman in our gospel is healed because Jesus, despite the taboos of his time, allowed her to touch him. We need to allow people in need to touch us -- to allow ourselves to be touched by their want. This might mean putting an arm around the shoulders of an elderly neighbor who may literally have been untouched by another human being for years. It might mean allowing ourselves to be touched by the hunger of a child a thousand miles away. When we cooperate with the forces that isolate us from one another, we diminish ourselves and the world. When we reach out to one another there’s a chance that we will be Christ’s hands in the world, so that he can heal the world, through us.