NO THANKS, I’LL PASS ON THE SECONDS

Just who is Sam Doonby? That’s the question everyone in Smithville, TX wants to know after a good-looking “Golden Boy” with nothing but a backpack hops off a bus and takes up residence there. As movie-goers soon learn, Sam is a drifter who just so happens to “bring love and peace” wherever he goes. Many in the town are thrown off kilter by this drifter. Their hearts haven’t been opened just yet to the notion of a drifter who only does good.

It doesn’t take long for Sam Doonby to become the talk of the town, the topic of ruinous conversations. To them, Sam’s just another good-for-nothing drifter who’s running away from something bad he’s done. I suspect the stereotypes of “criminal,” “wino,” maybe even “drug addict” were also mentioned in their reckless banter. In any case, their minds were made up before they had even met Sam.

I tend to think this town is comprised of far-too-many self-appointed subject matter experts in homelessness & drifters. Mind you not the kind of subject matter experts I work with who have in-depth educational training and a documented work history in their areas of expertise. These townsfolk really haven’t taken the time to notice that Sam’s always been doing nothing but good since coming to town. Like offering to drive a stranger home, bringing the joy of music to broken hearts, or stepping across the street to intervene and save the life of a robbery victim.

They just can’t see that Sam’s life is in fact filled with going before our Lord in prayer, asking for guidance and grace before embracing his neighbors. Sam Doonby lived his life on the road in this way – without exception – animated by Christ. Hmm, a drifter, a homeless man, embracing people not out of a sense of duty or guilt, but out of sheer love and generosity.

Sam Doonby becomes the misplaced blame for all the town’s troubles, and the town’s slow spiral of spiritual death accelerates, a whirlpool that has its source in the fires of hell. Despite the town’s problems and accusations, Sam lived the words of Jesus found in John chap. 14 verse 1: “Do not to let our hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me.”
You see my brothers and sisters, in material terms, both Sam and the Samaritan had precisely nothing to gain personally from their unselfish acts of charity. They were both outcasts, a mongrel breed, strangers in a foreign land, quite different I imagine from most of us here. And if we think about it, that’s probably what makes it difficult for us to grasp these & other dramatic acts of unexplainable compassion and unthinkable risk. But again, it’s really quite simple… if we want to co-operate with Christ, everyone must be a channel of His peace. You and I – without exception - must be known as neighbor.

So I wonder… are these stories of Sam Doonby and the Samaritan enough to convince us to abandon our opinions and behavior with respect to drifters and the homeless, let alone those acting out of fear and ignorance? Can we overcome the onslaught of supposed remedies offered by politicians and perpetuated from the comfort of one’s couch in a Facebook post or Twitter feed? Of course we can! And you and I – without exception - must!

But we can’t do it alone. Our Creator has sent us one to deliver us from evil, to help us overcome our prejudices, our vices, our sins. We need the Lord himself to intervene, through our prayer, praise, and worship, to animate us and bring us to a life full of love and charity, a love which is real and everlasting.

The alternative isn’t pretty. Every sacrilegious impulse we give in to reveals a little of that idol, a little of this politician, a little less Christ, a little more us, a little more emptiness and deceitfulness. We’re seeing this more & more in the world around us. Paul’s warning to the Colossians was clear – there is only one Lord, in this world and the next. Christ, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, Lord of heaven, Lord of earth. “Through the blood of his cross” and his resurrection, Christ is the only one who can save us and allow us to share in everlasting life.

For when we reach out and love our neighbor from a Christ-centric position, we make the invisible nature of God visible. We witness the inseparable pair of true love of God and love of neighbor. Acting out of God’s love for our earthly neighbors shows our neighbor whom we serve - Christ, the one and only true Lord of earth. Acting out of God’s love for our earthly neighbors also builds up the city of God, showing all that Christ is the one and only true lord of heaven.

My brothers and sisters, if you and I do not show love to the neighbor whom we see, then no matter what commandments we keep, no matter what rituals we join in, you and I will without fail become incapable of loving God, whom we cannot see. And if we forget who God is and what we mean to him, we will forget who we are.

So let us come before this heavenly banquet now even more conscious, more aware of our human nature and its capabilities for good, and our very own potential to love selflessly. Receive God’s son into your heart and be renewed, because the God we receive in this sacrament is love
Doonby, 2013. “Every nobody is somebody.”

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