

Minister's Message – July 2007

Harassed and Helpless

It is a complex problem but certainly not a new one, and not one confined to indigenous communities in Australia. Poverty has been around a long time, even though the Lord God said there should be no poor among you (Deuteronomy 15). Certainly the problem is exacerbated by other things in this particular case. Since the men do not have to work to get their food they are idle (they can live on Government welfare). Being idle they fill in their time with something, usually sinful activities. Alcohol is readily available, which along with pornography is disastrous, as recent reports show.

A pastor friend of mine often had beggars coming to his door. There is no welfare in the country where he lives so it really was like what the Bible says *he who does not work does not eat* (II Thessalonians 3:10). This pastor kept a pile of bricks in the corner of his yard. If the beggar was healthy he asked him to shift the pile to the other side of the yard. If he did this work he was given food or other help.

Poverty is complex and not easily overcome, least of all by giving money. Jesus came face to face with poverty when he lived in this world. As the Son of God he had infinite resources. How did he deal with this complex problem? We read in Matthew chapter 9 that Jesus went through villages, villages of poor people like those in Asia, in Africa and in central Australia. He saw the people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Seeing the people in their poverty Jesus had compassion on them. Certainly sin has to be dealt with and child molesters have to be brought to justice, but Jesus saw to the root of the problem. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Who will shepherd these people? Who will lead these people in the right way? Will people who have no compassion be fit for the task? Will authority figures in uniforms, some who drink alcohol and delight in pornography be fit for the job?

Jesus is the good shepherd, he is the great shepherd who loves the poor and needy and will lead them in the right way. What did Jesus do when he went through the villages in Palestine? He went about *teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and disease among the people.*

They had physical needs. They needed 'better health outcomes' in today's jargon. Jesus healed every sickness and every disease. Indigenous communities must have access to health care, primary health care and health education. But they also had spiritual needs. They needed meaning in life, they needed dignity, and they needed hope. Without hope it is impossible to help a person out of poverty.

Poverty and depravity are not only found in central Australia. In thousands of villages in Asia people do not get sufficient food their families. But at the same time you will find men in these villages drinking and abusing children. They leave their little girls to die of exposure or starvation. They are without God and without hope. They are lost and helpless.

Jesus told the villagers about the kingdom of God. He told them the good news; he told them that he had come to seek and to save the lost. He told them that he was the shepherd who would protect them from the 'wolves' and from all evil. Poor people are very vulnerable to exploitation by the rich and by the wicked. The good shepherd protects his flock and provides for them according to their needs (but not their greeds).

Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. This is what Jesus told his disciples. Pray that the Lord send 'under-shepherds' to the harassed and helpless in our land, and in all lands. May these under-shepherds be like the great shepherd who had compassion for the poor, who healed the sick, preached the truth and gave hope to the hopeless!

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon