

Faith Story

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Have you ever been in need? Well this is how I found myself in 2010. My husband had lost his job due to the recession in Michigan and I had lost my job, a job God had led me to in 2008 after a sermon about the Juniper tree and Elijah. I had taken a risk and moved from a non-profit job I loved to a Director of Health and Counseling at a Christian Private University and through a series of events found myself unemployed. I had done everything in earnest and worked endlessly for my community and yet found myself and my family were in the process of losing our house to foreclosure. We were out of time and money and were amid financial despair. Now, mind you we had families that were firmly middle class. We were not likely to be completely homeless, but as I looked around to see my two boys ages 2 and 4, it was hard to believe in a God who loves. As a professional mental health counselor, I had given so much extra time always to the community, volunteering services, and in committees, and meanwhile asked for so little. We lived in an impoverished low-income neighborhood and endured 3 shootings within a couple of blocks of our house that summer. We lived here because when we married, chose to live in the neighborhood I served to be an invested part of our community.

The night before I had surveyed our house. With few possessions left, I noted the remaining food. My parents were bringing a gleaners box from church later that day, this is the food we were eating. We were not on food stamps but it was getting close to needing to apply for government assistance because my parents were on a fixed income. I surveyed the kitchen and noted a couple of apples. I had nothing else. No eggs, no milk. I planned on asking my father for money for some milk and eggs. I had a big change jar and decided to roll coins and see what I had for a tank of gas. This was like in my undergraduate college days when you know every dollar that is in every pants pocket and bag. I remembered I had a couple of dollars in a bag that never made it into my wallet. I rolled the coins. It was more than I thought, I remember for sure there was one roll of quarters, one roll of dimes, two rolls of nickels and I am not sure, something like 3 rolls of pennies. Total I believe to be 20.50 plus the two single dollars from that bag. I don't like math, but this is relevant later. I was so sad and fearful to see that this was the money we had left. I just felt so alone.

The next morning my husband was gone, I don't remember where, I believe unemployment, but I am not sure. I surveyed the kitchen I did find some yeast and I had a little flour and decided to make two loaves of bread with this bag of flour. It was just a couple of small round loaves. The smell was warming to my soul but I was still filled with a creeping feeling of desperation. This is what my life was reduced to. I never felt so abandoned. After all I had done in the name of God, I felt unseen and invisible. I took the bread out of the oven and heard a knock on the door. I went to the door and there was a black man who was the most gaunt-looking man I had ever seen. His eyes looked hollow and his face lacked fat. His cheeks were sunken in. He was wearing dirty sweats and a winter coat. It was odd because it was a really warm sunny day. His face was extremely gaunt. He began "Hello Miss I have late-stage AIDS and I have sores in my mouth. I have to wear diapers because I am incontinent because of my AIDS and I just pooped my pants. I need adult diapers and I am in a bad way. Do you have 23, no, uh 28 dollars to help me." (Something to that effect) He went on, "It is like 24 dollars plus tax." Now I have had a lot of people in our neighborhood ask us for things throughout the years and I have had no problems turning them away. Because my husband is white I think there is a belief that we were

wealthier than we were. In addition, one time someone stole our lawnmower from our garage, and then suspiciously within a week someone offered to cut our lawn (for money of course). I have had people tell me their wife needs insulin or other such things and just have no problem shutting the door. However, this time, this time felt radically different. It is as if *something shifted inside of me*, something I cannot explain. I said, "I will be right back."

I left him on the stoop and fell up the stairs as I scrambled up to my bedroom closet to retrieve the rolled coins. I frantically found the bag with the two singles. I ran downstairs and handed him the 22.50. (I may have this part wrong. I know that it was short of what he needed, and I know what he needed was less than 30 and I know that I had one roll of quarters and one roll of dimes, an odd number of rolled pennies, and at least two rolls of nickels. But I may have had 5 rolls of pennies or three rolls of nickels). I said, "This is all I have in the world right now, it honestly is, but you may have it. It is not enough and I am sorry." He thanked me profusely and said it didn't matter something to the effect of thank you for helping as much as you could. I will find the rest somewhere.

He then apologized for talking slowly. He stated that it was the sores from the AIDS. He then asked, "*Do you have anything to eat, I am really tired and I have nothing to eat today and I am really weak.*" Something surged inside me and I ran to the kitchen. I retrieved the two apples and one of the loaves of bread. Placing the loaf and apples into a brown bag I ran back to the front door and handed the bag to him at the front step. I said something like, "I told him something like, "I made two loaves of bread this morning. You can have one. This is really all the food in the world that I have. Take these two apples and one loaf of bread." He then thanked me again profusely. He said it was rough because he had poop running down his leg.

Then he said, "*Do you have anything to drink because it is really hot out here and my mouth is filled with sores from my AIDS.*" I took a breath and looked at my kids who were on the living room floor not really paying attention to anything. Somehow, I was aware I had never invited him in. Whether it was the knowledge of his AIDS because he mentioned it three times (even though I know AIDS does not spread like that) or it was the fact that he stated that he was incontinent either way, I had closed the screen door each time leaving him outside on the stoop. I felt a pang of guilt and before I thought about it I found the words escaping my mouth, "All I have is ice water, but come on in." I ran to the cupboard in the kitchen, grabbing a big gulp 7-11 cup I filled it with ice water and a straw. I found him still by the living room. He had just crossed the threshold and was barely in the living room. "Here, have some water; you can take it with you." He took the tiniest of sips and set the glass down. He turned around to depart. He lifted the brown bag and thanked me again for the money and the food. He returned to the stoop and if an afterthought he turned and said to me, "*I would really like to give you a hug, is that okay, can I give you a hug?*" I am ashamed to admit this was hard for me. I am not a natural hugger type and also he repeatedly told me that he had poop running down his pants and stated that he had AIDS, he looked terrible and had a slight smell of ripened body odor. At that moment looking into his gaunt unwell face I realized I could not deny him anything. I was standing on the threshold and he was maybe six inches below the stoop. He still was taller than me (I am only 5'0) but as he grabbed me to hug me he put his face close to my right ear. I half thought he was trying to kiss me but he put his lips to my ear and whispered, "***You will have the job you want in 7 days.***" I started to tear. He turned and started walking down the sidewalk and as he left he waved and said, "I will return in 7 days and you will have that job." Stunned I shut the front door and crumpled to the floor and cried so hard. I felt like

something had just let go of my heart. I was struck by the image of Jacob's ladder and when Jacob wrestled with God and I could only think of the passage in Matthew 25:34.

34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

I never said anything about a job application. I said I had little means. Seven days later he did not physically visit me but I did receive a call from Director Gary Turner who offered me an Assistant Professor of Counseling role at Kenai Peninsula College. I had applied for the job more than four months prior and had received no word. At the time I applied, I was not even trying to land the job I just wanted a free trip to Alaska to interview. Also, I know we would have NEVER moved 4,000 miles away from our home base without being in such dire straights. At that point, the discomfort of moving 4k miles away seemed lessor than the discouragement of staying. God works in clear ways. Not in Hallmark movie ways, but through calling us close. Much like the story of the Juniper tree that had got me to go to the Christian University, it turns out that Alaska was my Juniper tree calling me to the world of the UA system. One such clear example is that our family was blessed with a child from Chevak which could have only ever happened because we were in Alaska following a path we could have never imagined. God is good.