


# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

 Beliefs: What's the most important teaching of Jesus?

## Breakfast on the Beach by Leif Kehrwald

I have always believed that the most important teaching of Jesus is forgiveness and reconciliation. As family members we are continually stepping on one another (literally and figuratively) and hurting one another. For the best Gospel teaching on forgiveness for families, recall the story in chapter 21 of John's Gospel.

Peter, James, John, Nathaniel, and the others are sitting around feeling sorry for themselves. Jesus has died, their lives have been turned upside down, and they honestly don't know what to do. At last Peter says he is going fishing. The others follow.

They get into the boat, fish all night long, and then feel even more depressed. At first light, a man appears at the shore and calls out, "Friends, have you caught anything?"

"No."

"Well, do you think it might help if you tossed your net on the other side of the boat?"

Thinking they really didn't have much to lose, the fishermen did this, and lo, they caught such a huge load of fish that they couldn't haul the nets into the boat. John turned to the shore and called out, "It is the Lord!" Hearing this, Peter threw on his clothes, jumped in the water, and swam ashore. Meanwhile the others hauled the fish.

When they arrived, there was a fire and bread, and Jesus beckoned them to bring some of the fish they had caught and put them on the fire. Like so many times before, they sat around the fire and shared a meal. And, as the Scriptures say, no one had to ask "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord.

How do you suppose they knew? I have to believe they knew those feelings of security, warmth, and familiarity in sharing a meal together with Jesus. For three years they had lived closely together and shared many meals, and this is just what it felt like.

Even in the midst of struggle and conflict, there can be something right about home. Oh, I know this isn't true for everyone, and many homes are wrought with discomfort, fear, and loneliness. But with time together, there is always hope.

Recall the next scene just after breakfast. Jesus and Peter had a conflict to resolve. I picture it this way:

Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Let's take a walk and talk a few things over."

Suddenly it all came back to Peter. "I denied him three times, and now I've got to face up to it. What am I going to say?"

As they walked along the shore, Jesus began by asking, "Peter, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord, I love you."

Three times Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to make this proclamation. It's no coincidence: three denials followed by three proclamations of faith.

What an extraordinary model of reconciliation Jesus gives us in this story. I wonder how many times I've laid into my sons with a lecture, when what they really needed was an opportunity to say they were sorry and tell me they loved me.

Yet the story of Peter's reconciliation is closely tied to that breakfast on the beach. We really can't separate one from the other. Without creating that atmosphere of warmth and security

The church recognizes the power of forgiveness through the sacrament of Reconciliation (or Penance). Some may know this sacrament by the term *confession*, because we confess our sins to a priest. The priest serves as a representative of both God and the community in the sacrament. But confessing our sins is only one step in the process. We must also be truly sorry and attempt to repair the damage our sin has done.

Peter must have felt terribly guilty about denying Jesus three times. Yet the Catholic church believes that this passage (John 21:15–19) establishes Peter as the leader of the early church and as the first pope, indicated by Jesus' commands to Peter to "feed my lambs" and "tend my sheep." By linking Peter's reconciliation to Peter's authority, John seems to be reminding the church to be humble and forgiving.

around the hearth, reconciliation would have been much harder to come by.

When we spend time together, sharing meals and just hanging out, the channels for communication and reconciliation stay open. Resolving conflict, while always painful, remains possible.

# The Woman on the Bus

by Luke Kehrwald, age 15

I am a sophomore at LaSalle High School in Milwaukie, Oregon. I live ten miles from school and do not have a driver's license. Therefore, I travel on public transportation for over an hour each day. To pass the time, I watch people. After several years of riding the bus, I have seen a lot of what society has to offer. Many times I have sat watching and wondered: "What is her story? Where is he going? What are they thinking?"

With a busy high school schedule, the bus is also a great place to get some rest. I fall asleep regularly, and I have had some very interesting dreams.

It was a bitter cold Tuesday evening, and I sat in the back of the bus one seat away from the window, my regular spot. The movement of the bus was lulling me to sleep, but this is what I remember from that ride.

A middle-aged woman boarded and sat a few seats away from me. She had on very little clothing for the cold winter weather. Her meager clothes were torn and covered in coffee stains. She pulled a small flask out of her pocket, and I realized that the liquor it contained was what kept her warm.

We stopped at the mall, and the bus quickly filled up. Just before the bus pulled away, a young businessman boarded. He was decked out in a full three-piece suit, trench coat, and leather briefcase. To his obvious displeasure, the only remaining seat was next to the woman in tattered clothes. He took off his trench coat, sat down carefully, and slid his briefcase between his feet.

The woman introduced herself in somewhat slurred speech. He ignored her completely. Undaunted, the woman told the man about all she had done that day. When she got no response, she simply continued talking. She told him all about the last week, the last couple of months, and finally the entire year.

Her name was Mary Goodman. It used to be Mary Steele. She had been married twelve years and had two children when her husband left and took the children without an explanation. Mary then had a nervous breakdown, and everything fell apart. She lost her job as a secretary, and in turn lost her house. Her situation had been going downhill for the past two years. Now she spends her days riding the bus, hoping to find her children, even though she knows they probably live in another city.

She took two crumpled pictures from her back pocket, showed them to the man and said, "These are my two darlings. If you see them, tell them their mother misses them."

Then she signaled the bus to stop, and she started to rise. The man reached out and lightly grabbed her arm. "I will surely tell them," he said in a meek voice. Then he took his trench coat and wrapped it around Mary. She whispered, "Thanks," before disappearing into the night.

I jerked awake just in time to catch a glimpse of the man getting off the bus. I cannot honestly say I noticed if he had his trench coat or not. Was it all just a dream? Maybe so, but I don't think it really matters. Dream or no dream, I will always remember the light in the man's face when he gave Mary his coat.

And if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

(Matthew 5:40–43, NRSV)

## The Good Samaritan

The good Samaritan is a popular Bible story (Luke 10:30–37) with an obvious message: We must help others. But did you know it is also a story about prejudice and discrimination? In Jesus' day, the Samaritans were despised by the Jews, even though Abraham was the father of faith for both groups. Jesus' making a Samaritan the hero of the story would have given the lawyer and other people listening to Jesus something to think about.

It seems that when we have a real relationship with others—even with those who are different from us—we are less likely to be prejudiced or discriminatory. Maybe we should work in communities to invite all people to get to know one another better so that all "Samaritans" are regarded as good. What do you think?

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