



Compassion

2023 - Second Quarter

Gathering His Own

At the end of the book of Acts, Luke recounts how God made use of hurricane winds that blew Paul's ship some 600 miles off course and shipwrecked him off the tiny, isolated island of Malta in order to spread the message of the gospel (Acts 27:14-28:10). While the Scriptures never tell us anything more about the 275 men with Paul who survived the shipwreck, or all the people on that remote little island who heard the gospel while Paul was there, we do know that God's Word does not "return to Him empty" (Is. 55:11). God is always *gathering His own*, bringing them to faith through the preaching of the gospel. Sometimes that means blowing His messenger 600 miles off course, and sometimes it means using a seemingly chance encounter at a church 60 miles away, to steer a messenger to someone God wants to hear the gospel.

When the service was over at the church where I had been invited to preach, a member of the congregation came up and asked, "Did I hear you say that you

teach a Bible class at Kettle Moraine Correctional?" "Every Wednesday," I replied. In response, the woman began telling me about a young man named *Darnel*, whom she had befriended when he began visiting their church.

Darnel had only attended a handful of times before his past caught up to him, and he ended up in prison. Having kept in touch with *Darnel*, she recognized the prison I mentioned in my sermon as the place where *Darnel* was serving his sentence, which was why she sought me out. "Would you be able to visit *Darnel* the next time you go into the prison" she asked? I assured her that I would do my best to connect with him through our office and suggested that she write to *Darnel*, as well, and tell him about my Bible class at the prison.

Two weeks later, *Darnel* joined my Bible class and was very eager to hear about his Savior. About two years after that, *Darnel* was confirmed and faithfully

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about how you can reach
walled-in souls through
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Blooming in Grace

Clarice had been in jail for more than a year. She had pretty much resigned herself to the possibility that she would soon be sent to prison. Her situation seemed dire.

I first visited *Clarice* after her bunk-mate, *Mara*, had given me her name. *Mara* said that *Clarice* really needed to hear some good news in her life, and she was willing to meet with me. Soon *Clarice* and I were meeting every week to spend time in God's Word and prayer.

Initially, *Clarice* was fairly shy and guarded. Nevertheless, just like *Mara* had done, she soon shared the opportunity to hear about God's amazing love with two other women. She knew that they, too, needed to hear the Gospel message of love and forgiveness through Jesus.

What a blessing for *Clarice*, and her two friends. Despite the difficult situation in her life, *Clarice* believed that God was working it out for her

good. She heard the message of God's amazing grace. The Holy Spirit worked faith in her heart to believe that Jesus had forgiven her sins by his perfect life, innocent death, and victorious rising from the dead. She understood the urgency to share that glorious message with others.

This is a great example of the adage "Bloom where you are planted." This little phrase reminds us of what God's Word tells us. It reminds us that God has promised to work all things out for our good no matter how dire our lives may appear. We had recently discussed this very thing in our Bible study about the life of Joseph in the Old Testament.

Knowing that God had a plan and was working out all things for his good kept Joseph from becoming bitter. He did not complain; he did not seek revenge; he did not despair. He knew that God would use every detour, pain, and suffering he endured to fulfill his perfect will. Instead, Joseph

forgave his brothers: "And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." (Genesis 45:5)

Thank God that *Clarice* is blooming! Through the work of the Holy Spirit, her faith is blooming. Her faith is shining through the darkness of her situation. The witness she gives to her loving, faithful God is drawing others to the hope that she now has through Jesus.

We don't often see what's going on in the hearts of people. However, we can always trust that God is working, as promised, through his powerful Word. How humbling and amazing it is that we have the privilege to be the messengers of this Good News. How precious it is that God allowed me to see his work in *Clarice's* heart.



by Chaplain
Sarah Guenther



Challenged

After 34 years as a chaplain with Institutional Ministries, it can be tempting to think I've seen it all and done it all. But no. God has an endless bag of surprises, and he loves to pull new stuff out. I started facilitating a class of prison inmates a few months ago that are a little different from what I've gotten used to: they're not all in my group voluntarily. Several of them have been caught with drugs while in prison, and now they're under orders to take part in a recovery group.

The guys who have come to my groups over the years are usually aware of their problem already and want to find out more about how the God of grace can free them from the tyranny of addiction. But now I'm working with some guys who aren't convinced A) that they have a problem; and B) that the God revealed in the Bible has the help they need. So, I've encountered a little attitude. (It almost takes me back to my time in parish ministry, teaching catechism to sullen adolescents who were dragged there by their parents.)

So, it's a challenge. And challenges

are good, or at least they can be when you turn them over to God – "Lord, YOU have a challenge here. How do YOU want to handle it?"

I've been seeing some amazing things happen. I'm watching guys suddenly perk up and start sharing experiences and insights that tie right in with the Bible truths I'm telling them. I'm seeing guys shift from bored and disconnected to interested and engaged. Best of all, I'm hearing them bring up their frustration and anger.

Currently I'm teaching them a course called God Is My Anger Manager. In times past, I've presented the material in this course to church groups, but I've never had the response I'm getting from these guys. It turns out that some of these guys have been living in a state of almost constant rage. They're angry about growing up in poverty, they're angry about the inconsistent ways that rules get enforced, they're angry with the people they're forced to live in close quarters with, and they're sometimes angry with themselves. Now, all of a sudden, they have a chance to talk



about it without being judged or shut down, and they are talking!

I don't have too many solutions to offer them – a lot of the stuff they're talking about is way beyond my experience. I can give them God's promise that he will listen, love, forgive, and stay with them in whatever situation they're in. I get to watch as God turns their rage into thoughtfulness, and their loneliness into community, and their hopelessness into trust. I come away exhausted every time but excited for the next encounter. I'm loving this challenge, and I believe God enjoys getting challenged, too.



by Chaplain
Philip Merten

continued to study God's Word with me for almost five years before he was transferred to another prison. Looking back on it now, I realize that God had used a seemingly chance encounter with a parishioner some 60 plus miles from the prison where I served to connect me with a young man to whom He wanted the message of the gospel to reach. Once again, God had been faithful to His promise. To paraphrase Isaiah: *His word did not return empty but accomplished what He desired and achieved the purpose for which He sent it.*

Day after day, God continues to use Institutional Ministries to bring His gospel to souls like Darnel who are living on islands surrounded, not by water, but by barbed wire and electric fences. Here we proclaim the promises of God to those who have shipwrecked their lives with the poor choices they have made. Yet, even here, in these places isolated from society, God continues to *gather His own* through the preaching of His Word.



by Chaplain
Joseph Radsek





Shining the light of Jesus' love
on the walled-in souls of our communities!

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*To provide
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