

Goodness A-Plenty

A Modern Day Parable inspired by Matthew 14:13-21



When Beth heard of the death of her dear cousin, Joan, she withdrew to her office by herself. Joan and Beth had always been best friends; they were just lucky enough to also be family. The two were about six years apart. Joan was older, and Beth had followed in her footsteps.

In fact, Beth became a social worker because Joan had paved the way. The two opened the Community Care Clinic years ago, but cancer had forced Joan into early retirement. Now, Beth was at the helm providing aide and assistance to families struck by difficult times and financial hardship. They provided resources, guidance, and practical help to get them through their struggles and back on their feet. Folks came from several counties when disaster struck, and life threw them a low blow — like the recent flooding across the tri-county area.

Beth took some time to let the tears flow — a testimony of the deep love for her cousin. She decided to give herself a break and close early. It was Friday afternoon. Surely the people would all understand. She would assure everyone that they would all be taken care of first thing Monday morning. Beth stood up, wiped her face, straightened her jacket, smoothed her hair, and stared at the picture from their grand opening. “You’re on your own now kid!” she said to herself. She thought about the excitement from that day, and the grief in her eyes quickly turned into a sparkle, and a brilliant smile erased the sadness from her face. She could hear Joan saying, “That’s enough for now, cuz. There are people in great need waiting for you. Go do your thing, dear. I’m still with you in spirit!”

When Beth descended the stairs and saw the vast crowd, her heart was moved with pity for them. There were people everywhere. Every chair was occupied, and more people were standing than sitting. Beth had never seen it so busy! A young couple who looked worried and worn out caught her eye. Each was holding a wailing baby doing that familiar bouncy walk of new parents, pacing back and forth across the floor, trying to calm their newborn twins. Another couple nearby juggled two toddlers who kept passing from one parent’s lap to the other. Two elderly couples occupied one corner of the room and seemed quite content and oblivious to everyone else. The women were deep in conversation, seated with legs crossed at the ankles, and purses planted in their laps. Their husbands stood behind them having a totally different chat. Beth thought they looked like a little snapshot of the 1950s. A little boy who seemed to be about 6 years old was laid out on the floor under the window napping. This was a rare moment of peace for his mother.

The boy had whined and complained the better part of an hour, despite the fact that she had brought a backpack filled with things to keep him occupied, including a brand new box of crayons. He had thrown a tantrum because it was the 24-pack and he wanted the 48-count box.

Beth called for the next in line and began taking care of each household, assessing their needs, and planning the recovery efforts. When it was evening, her assistant came to her and said, “It is getting late. Why not dismiss the crowds so they can go back to their neighborhoods and get food for themselves? We can finish these cases next week.”

Though many had already been helped, the room was still very full. Beth looked around, smiled, and said, “There is no need for them to go away; we will give them food ourselves.” Her assistant looked bewildered and responded, “Coffee and a few stale donuts are all we have here!” A single mother of three, overheard this conversation. She desperately needed to get help today. She was behind on paying some of her bills due to recent surgery. Her job didn’t pay well, and she was barely making ends meet. The flood had caused extension damage to their small home. They lost nearly everything — furniture, clothing, and more. Humbled by Beth’s untiring energy and generosity, the woman spoke out to the room. “Let’s all chip in and order pizza!” She dumped out the few broken crayons from her daughter’s paper sack and continued, “All I have is \$4, but I’m putting in so that we can all stay and make sure everyone gets helped today.” This commotion woke up the boy by the window. He watched as the pizza lady dramatically stuffed her money in the bag like a magician putting a handkerchief in his hat preparing to amaze the crowd by pulling out a rabbit. “Pass the bag around, please,” she said. “Put in a couple of bucks if you can. If you can’t we won’t keep score. We will get what we can afford, and everyone will get a share!”

The paper sack made its way around the room and back to Beth’s assistant. She counted the money and found enough to buy several large pizzas and drinks for everyone. All were ordered to sit down, children on the floor, adults in the chairs. Someone said a blessing and gave out the food. The little boy brought his brand new box of crayons and gave some out to the other children. They all ate, played and were satisfied. There was enough pizza left over for each family to take some home.

