



March 3, 2021 We're All Children of God

The other day I heard the most remarkable story of renewal. I was talking to the chair of the board of a homeless serving agency here in Victoria. And he was telling me about a converted hotel where they housed 16 formerly unhoused people. When the individuals first came they took pictures of all of them. Three months into the program the staff said to him, 'we need to take new pictures.' And he said, 'why?' And the staff said these people don't look anything like they did three months ago. The experience of having a door they could close, a place they could sleep in safety, of having showers and meals, and access to services, had so transformed them that they were, literally, unrecognizable.

One of the things that has shocked me about living on Vancouver Island is the huge number of people living in tents. There is a narrative that this is somehow ok because the climate is milder here. And there is an even more pernicious narrative that we shouldn't really bother trying to address this because if we did there would just be more homeless people that would come and we would never really solve the problem.

This defeatist thinking and this is ethically suspect thinking. For there are no 'homeless people' there are only children of God with tragic and beautiful stories that we must listen to and that we must address.

And if that argument doesn't do it for you, let's talk dollars and cents. All the evidence shows, study after study, that a person experiencing homelessness costs the system about \$100 000 a year. It's a huge number. And it's so big because, well, first you have the budgets of the homeless serving agencies doing their best to help people who are unhoused access our patchwork of services.

But, there's also this huge chunk that comes from the fact that unhoused people are more likely to end up on emergency rooms. Are more likely to have interactions with bylaw and police. Are more likely, because of those interactions, to end up in our justice system. All of that is very expensive. Compare that with the cost of affordable or supportive housing, which comes in more like at \$35 000 a year and you start to see that what we're doing really doesn't make any sense.

And so my friends, next time you pass an unhoused or a homeless person on the street, next time you see someone living in a tent, look them in the eye and imagine what they would look like after three months of living in safety.