

Living Out the Gospel – Tip #2

Pay it Forward



I'm told that before my first cup of coffee in the morning, I am not the friendliest person in the world. In fact, the term "bear-like" has been used on occasion to describe my early morning demeanor. One particular morning a few months ago, I was especially living into that description. Having delayed my morning intake of coffee nectar, I found myself in a rather long line at the Tim Horton's Drive Thru. Thoughts of cosmic unfairness rapidly bounced through my mind in pinball-like fashion. I couldn't imagine anyone else in that line having the same intense coffee needs that I had. As my pity party continued, I concluded that the minivan in front of me was full of kids who would probably change their order dozens of times, unable to reach a consensus on either the number of Timbits to order or their varieties. I'm not sure, but in the 3 minutes it took to get my coffee, I may at one point have echoed the ancient prophetic plea, "How long O Lord?" As already intimated, pre-coffee Doug is not necessarily a pleasant image.

So, imagine my surprise when it was my turn at the drive-up window, and the remarkably pleasant person who handed me my coffee, informed me with a warm smile on her face, that today's coffee was free of charge due to the generosity of the folks in that minivan in front of me. Talk about light piercing the darkness. In an instant, that one act of kindness broke into my coffee addicted funk, dispelling my unfounded grievances with the world, allowing me to see the radiant beams of blessing all around.

Something in that moment gripped me and without even thinking about it, I handed my Tim Horton's card to the young woman and said, "Let me pay for the person behind me." To which she exclaimed, "Wow! This is great! You're the 5th person in a row to pay it forward!" I could tell by the genuine excitement in her voice, that I and at least 4 other people had made her day. Though I have no idea why she was so excited by this seemingly simple task of paying it forward, I can imagine that perhaps she just needed to see people caring for one another. Maybe she needed to see that people are capable of doing good things. Or perhaps her

excitement came from seeing the looks on the faces of her astonished customers upon hearing the good news of free coffee. Whatever the reason, a few people “paying it forward” at Tim Hortons seemed to have a profound impact on this young woman; and me as well.

A long time ago, the Apostle Paul had something to say about “paying it forward.”

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Even Jesus made reference to this concept when he told his earliest followers,

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)

I’m not saying that Paul and Jesus specifically had Tim Hortons in mind in these sacred exhortations, but they definitely had the concept of “paying it forward” down. We are recipients of love beyond imagination. In the waters of baptism, we have not only been clothed with Christ, but we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation; the ministry of passing God’s love on; the ministry of paying it forward.

Perhaps the pastor and poet Barbara Brown Taylor says it best:

“The hardest spiritual work in the world is to love the neighbor as the self – to encounter another human being not as someone you can use, change, fix, help, save, enroll, convince or control, but simply as someone who can spring you from the prison of yourself, if you will allow it.” (An Altar in the Word, A Geography of Faith)

I am under no illusion that knowing all this about God will make me a perky and chipper person before my first cup of coffee. But how hopeful it is to know that despite the morning grumpies, God’s love not only surrounds me, but from time to time will transform me and perhaps even inspire me to pass love on to those around me by a simple act of kindness, or even a steaming cup of Tim Hortons coffee.

Peace and Love,
Pastor Doug