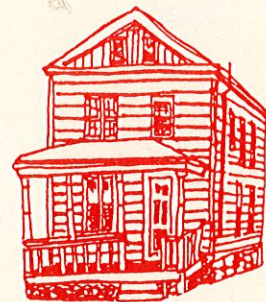


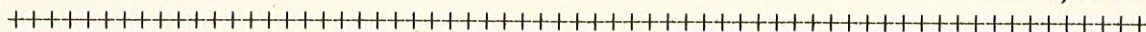
TROUBADOUR

The Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, Connecticut



Advent 2004

Vol. 6, No. 3



Lost in the Woods: An Advent Meditation

by Mark Auer

ONE OF THE THINGS that most frightens children is not knowing where they are. We call this being "lost"; lost in the wilderness, lost in space, lost to the world. When I was a boy I was a member of the Boy Scouts of America. We spent a lot of time hiking around the woods of upstate New York, sleeping in tents, walking some more, climbing tall hills, sleeping in the rain in tents, walking some more, eating undercooked and overseasoned food, sleeping in underheated cabins in the winter, walking through the snow, and generally getting out from underneath the feet of parents for weekends, or in the summer, weeks at a time. I remember those days fondly. At the time, I was an indifferent student, not a particularly gifted athlete; about the only thing that I really enjoyed was participating in the life of our parish church, St. Mark's in Syracuse, where my father was the Rector. Troop 34 met in the church undercroft on Wednesday evenings. My father soon signed me up as a new member, a "Tenderfoot" Scout. In the 1950's all young Scouts learned the rudiments of campcraft, cooking, and how to navigate with a map and a compass. Maps have always fascinated me, and my first exposure to practical navigation was in the Boy Scouts. Here I had found an activity at which I could excel. I could get from point A to point B and not get "lost in the woods". One way that we were taught to keep our bearings was to keep track of where we had been. We learned how to mark trails, build cairns and leave signs so that even if we were unsure about where we were going, we knew at all times exactly where we had been, and could retrace our steps to a previously known position. It was with great glee that I won a statewide contest at the age of 11 for what has now become known as the sport of "orienteering." Orienteering, indeed. In the summer of 1967 I was able to put my scout skills to good use as an infantry soldier in Vietnam. We had a good story in Vietnam about our Army. We said that the only difference between the Boy Scouts and the Army was that the Scouts had adult leadership.

Now, I wonder about leadership. I am concerned about where our nation has been; not so much for me, but for my children and their friends, companions on the way. I wonder about leadership for two reasons: first, that the leadership of our country does not know where it has been; second, and more chilling for me, that the leadership knows

exactly where it has been and is committed to "stay the course," the course of the American Empire.

Published in 1980 and now, sadly, out of print, William Appleman Williams' *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts About an Alternative* is a deceptively thin tome. Early on in the book Williams confronts us with the truth about what the United States Constitution really is: "The Constitution was both the instrument and the symbol of a conscious decision to create a particular kind of system rather than allow the society to develop through random competition between economic and other forces."

Williams writes his history in precise language. Our spoken language today has become flabby. We find it difficult to say exactly what we mean, and then, I think, because we are by nature lazy, we finish the sentence with some inanity such as "You know what I'm saying"? which was common a few years ago.

Williams begins his analysis with an explanation of the difference between "The State" and "The Establishment": "The man who revived the term The Establishment, Henry Fairly, based his usage on a sophisticated understanding of why and how a way of life, a world-view or *Weltanschauung*, informs and guides the people who constitute the State. The Establishment, he insightfully insists, 'is not those people who hold and exercise power as such. It is the people who create and sustain the climate of assumption and opinion within which power is exercised by those who do hold it by election or appointment'. He is making a crucial distinction." Williams notes that we



make a serious mistake if we confuse the two terms. "In the first place, we foster an illusion that electing or appointing different people will produce or lead to a change in the outlook or *Weltanschauung*. But we are in reality changing the wrong people...The central issue here does not involve the small or elitist nature of the Establishment: all groups of people produce leaders who become the spokesmen of the shared interest or idea. The important consideration is our lack of participation in the dialogue. In a republic or a democracy, we the citizens are supposed to order the priorities and relationships between the economic, the political, the social and intellectual, and the military aspects of life through an on-going discussion. *We are supposed to be the Establishment*. As it is, we limit ourselves to choosing between generally minor variations on one theme composed by others."

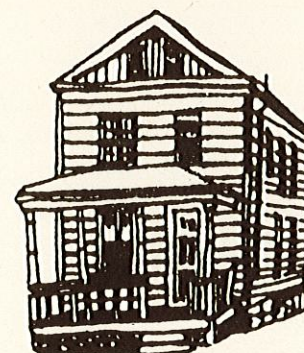
As I read through *Empire as a Way of Life* I was struck by the fact that here was not only a "history" of the American Empire, but even more intriguing, a *systematic* history. Jefferson, Madison, Henry Clay, Woodrow Wilson, the Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, the League of Nations, all of these I remember from High School and College history classes. What I never had been exposed to was the system which held the entire enterprise together. The system is deceptively simple: I want to have more than I need to live on. If I have to invade your territory and subjugate you in order to do this, I will. I will do this under the banner of "free elections," or "democracy," "Free Trade Agreements" or whatever nice, happy, hopeful sounding slogan I can think of. I'll "make the World Safe for Democracy,"

so that I can have more than you have, and make you economically dependent upon me.

I think that I was in the third or fourth grade when the Pledge of Allegiance was altered to include the words "under God". You remember how it goes: "I pledge allegiance to the flag/ of the United States of America/ and to the Republic, for which it stands/ one nation, under God, indivisible/ with liberty and justice for all." I think that we would have been more honest with our selves if we had left out "under God".

I think that our country is "Lost in the Woods"-lost because we have followed the law of Empire, not the law of the One who created us, all of us, as equals. Perhaps we need to revisit that road map that is delineated so explicitly in the Hebrew Scriptures. As I sit here in my office on the last day of the Christian year, I am resolving to revisit that map to see if I can find some pointers to help me better "love my neighbor as myself." As we approach the season of The Incarnation, I invite you to join me.

Mark Auer, a recent graduate of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass., is a resident of St. Francis House.



An Experiment with Truth

by Emmett Jarrett, TSSF



WHEN ED RODMAN AGREED to join me in a Friday night clarification of thought presentation on Gandhi and King, I didn't realize how important that public conversation would be for me. Ed is a good friend and a wonderful man to work with on the issues of justice and peace that animate both our lives, so I expected to learn something, be challenged about something, and to have a good time. All those things happened on Friday night, November 19, at St. Francis House. But for me something much more important also happened, something that deepened my understanding of my own life, and challenged me to live my commitments and convictions more fully.

In the presentation on Gandhi and King as examples of "saints for the 21st century," I talked about Gandhi and Ed talked about King. Ed knew King personally in the early days of the Civil Rights struggle, and was able to speak of the stages of King's development, his conversion to nonviolence. He mentioned a gathering of young activists at a CORE meeting at the Highlander Center in Tennessee where King expected to be the center of attention. Ella Baker told him the movement "didn't need leader-centered groups but group-centered leaders."

I talked about Gandhi's life and commitment to nonviolence. I chose to focus on the famous Salt March of 1930, where Gandhi led thousands of Indians to the sea to "make salt" and avoid the British government's tax. The choice of salt was brilliant - everyone needed it, and God provided it free of charge in the

oceans and the earth. The Empire's tax was clearly an exercise in imperial power to humiliate a subject people. The public outcry that followed Gandhi's imprisonment and the British police brutality against Indian nonviolent resisters (*satyagrahi*) turned the tide of world opinion in favor of Indian independence. Independence took seventeen more years of struggle, but the salt march was the turning point.

I wanted the people assembled at St. Francis House to discover what "our salt march" against imperial power might be. When I posed the question, after a silence Ed said, "It's not going to happen. This country is not ready for mass action like that." Nobody disagreed. Ed suggested that we work with others to end the death penalty and expose the "prison industrial complex" that is the result of massive privatization. If we're courageous enough we could advocate repeal of the drug laws which account for 70% of the prison population and were not in force in 1970. But we're not going to have a salt march any time soon.

The conversation went on that night and people talked about ways to expose the racism in US domestic policy and its logical extension in the war against the people of color in the Two-Thirds World. But I was inwardly facing up to the egotism of my assumption that I could be the one to find the "salt march" for our time. In the light of Ed's analysis, which is always kind but also relentless, I knew I had let my own need to be the center of attention delude me into thinking we could do "bigger things" than in fact we can. The problem with such an attitude is that it short-circuits my (and our) ability to do what we *can* do, and leads to frustration if not despair.



John Robertson told me later that it reminded him of Eliot's play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, in which Thomas Becket had to ask himself whether he was "doing the right thing for the wrong reason.")

The next morning, when Ed and I talked over coffee, I told him all this. He said, "No, no, man – anybody who has the will to look for revolutionary actions should do it – always being aware of the cost to himself of such action. Try to find the 'salt march' for our time. Just don't give up on the issues that highlight the racism of society and offer people a chance to see things more clearly, step by step." We agreed to keep working both sides of the street: to deepen consciousness, and to seek ways to live differently and "build the new society within the shell of the old." But I embark upon this quest with a chastened spirit, and perhaps a bit less egotism in my discipleship.

Gandhi, my hero, called his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. In that book, he reports his mistakes and failures, in personal as well as political life. He tells of the things he learned from his wife Kasturbai and the costliness of his own humility. In sharing my experience with the St. Francis House community and readers of the TROUBADOUR, I'm trying to do that, too. It has to do with spiritual transparency, letting the light shine in the dark corners of my own life. As Alyosha said in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "I can't give two roubles instead of 'all,' and only go to mass instead of 'following Him.'"

I hope sharing this story of my belated attempt to live my life as an "experiment with truth" will help you do that, too. I know it's helping me.



Calendar of Events from January to June 2005

- January 21** First Friday night meeting for clarification of thought.
- February 4** Clarification of Thought
- 18** Clarification of Thought
- 23-26** Episcopal Urban Caucus Assembly in Newark
- March 4** Clarification of Thought
- 18** Clarification of Thought
- 25** Good Friday Stations of the Cross at US Submarine Base, Groton, CT
- April 1** Clarification of Thought
- 9** Saturday, 3-5 p.m., "Come and See"
- 15** Clarification of Thought & "Income Tax Day" witness
- 29** Clarification of Thought
- May 13** Clarification of Thought
- 13-15** St. Francis House Board Meeting
- 27** Clarification of Thought
- June 25** Anniversary Party in Williams Park with "Mass on the Grass"

The theme of this year's meetings for clarification of thought is *Gospel Discipleship and "Moral Values"* – reflections on last year's election from a radical discipleship perspective.

All meetings are on Friday night. We begin with Evening Prayer and Bible Study at 5:30 p.m., then a simple meal at 6 p.m., followed by discussion and



conversation from 7-8:30 p.m. The conversations are not "lectures," but we listen to each other in order to "clarify" our thought by engaging with others. The meal is not "pot luck." Those who come are our guests. Child care is provided for young children.



Wish List for St. Francis House

Apartment size gas stove
Apartment size refrigerator
Two burner hotplate
Wastepaper baskets for apartments, offices and bathrooms

New London Winter Homeless Shelter

Last year, churches in New London joined with the City to open homeless hospitality centers in December, a month before the City shelter was available. This year, a coalition that includes the City's Department of Health and Social Services, First Step, Inc., a non-profit agency offering employment, social rehabilitation, case management and residential services to individuals with mental health disabilities, and the New London Clergy Association, has established the shelter starting December 1, 2004, and open through March 31, 2005. Mount Moriah Fire Baptized Holiness Church is the host site, thanks to the hospitality of the Rev. L. David Cornish and his congregation. St. Francis House is providing staff coordination and serving as a "pass through" account to raise money for laundering bedclothes, purchasing fresh fruit and baked goods, and incidental expenses. If you would like to make a financial contribution, please make checks payable to St. Francis House, with the notation **For Homeless Shelter**. Contributions made in this way are tax deductible.

They Came and Saw

by Barbara and Doug Barrett

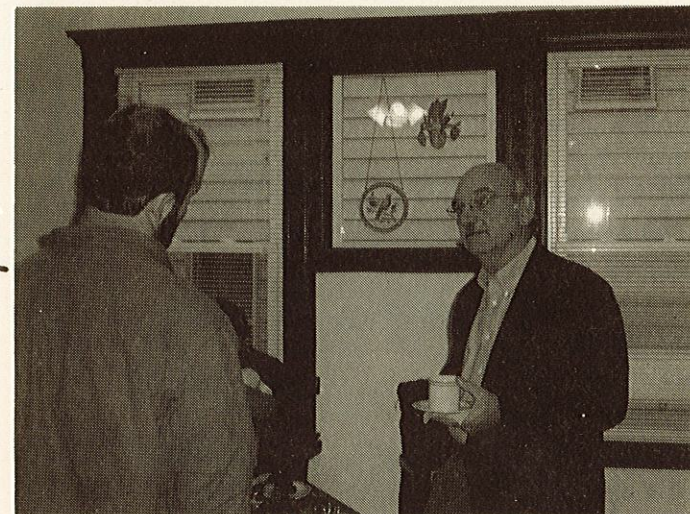
On Sunday afternoon, November 21, over 40 people attended the first local "Come and See" gathering in Saint Francis House's newly renovated space at 32 Broad Street, next door to the "parent" house at 30 Broad. For many of these folks, it was their first introduction to the work and ministries of Saint Francis House in the city of New London and surrounding area.

Emmett welcomed guests and gave a bit history as orientation. Arthur Lerner spoke about his new project. (See next page.) There was food, fellowship, and visual presentations highlighting some of the work in which the Saint Francis House community is currently involved: CURE, a bilingual education reform group; Southeastern CT Peace and Justice Network; Community Gardens; the winter shelter for people who are homeless. Anne provided tours of the living spaces now available in the house for potential residents who are interested in becoming part of the life and work of the Saint Francis House community.

Anne also provided tours of the Hermitage, a fully furnished living space behind Saint Francis House, which is available for retreats and sabbatical times. The Hermitage is an urban, yet peaceful, hide-away, sort of tucked in among trees, with a beautiful view of New London. The Hermitage can also be used for day-long gatherings for small groups. We even got a sneak preview of the space under the Hermitage—the next project in terms of renovation. That area will be offered as transitional housing for individuals needing a temporary place to stay while they work toward independent living.

The old Victorian at 32 Broad Street is a beautiful house, meticulously restored under the careful supervision of Arthur Lerner. There are coal fireplaces, a turret, and old, ornate woodwork. The preservation of this house is, in itself, one of the good works of Saint Francis House. Now there is space for more people to come and see if they may be called to the kind of communal urban ministry which emanates from Saint Francis House.

Barbara and Doug Barrett, new SFH Board members, hosted this first local event.



*Above: Ted Olynciw (right), new SFH board member and rehab worker, talks with rehab Site Manager Arthur Lerner.
Below: Restored front hall staircase.*



Members of Community Gardens of New London visit Southside Community Land Trust's City Farm in Providence, R.I. From left to right: Anne Scheibner, Barbara Dixon (Neighborhood Coordinator for the City of New London), Henry Scudder, Calvin Ferguson (our neighbors and participants in SFH Community Garden), Arthur Lerner and John Button (Site Manager for our neighbors at the Williams Park Community Garden site). This September field trip was one of the inspirations for Arthur's envisioning F.R.E.S.H.

EXTRA! EXTRA! F.R.E.S.H.! F.R.E.S.H.!

by Arthur Lerner

Saint Francis House is excited to shepherd a new initiative called F.R.E.S.H. (Food: Resources, Education, Security, Health) New London. SFH will act as this start-up program's fiduciary umbrella for 2005.

The mission is to work in partnership to strengthen food security in our region and to move beyond 'anti-hunger' activism by building local capacity and control. Current collaborators include: The Labor/United Way Food Center, Community Partnerships, Connecticut College, Drop-in-Learning Center, Temple Beth-El, O.I.C., Housing Authority and the Alternative Incarceration Center.

The heart of our work in 2005 will be our youth work corps. I will be organizing the training of six teenage workers in issues of hunger, nutrition, diet, as well as in culinary and agricultural skills and then provide these young people paid experience doing positive work in their community. Their work growing and gleaning food for free distribution will add precious nutrient dense produce to the free food supply in New London. Their efforts at developing and sharing educational tools with food recipients and children will help to build the capacity in the community to appreciate, grow, handle, and prepare fresh food.

Our projects will include our own production gardens, assisting an interfaith group to grow a 'soup-kitchen' garden for free distribution, advocating and supporting new and existing community gardens in New London, and broad community education focused on food relief recipients and children.

We look forward to our list of collaborators growing. Maybe you want to be one? For those who want to roll up their sleeves to help plow the back forty, please be in touch. For others who have a financial contribution in mind, our current needs include:

- \$1,500 for each of 6 teenage workers-(275 hours)
- \$1,200 to buy and operate a good rototiller
- Donations in any amount, in kind or in cash, to buy everything from compost to poster-board, from seeds to gas, all needed in order to make this a success.

For more information or to get involved, please contact me at (860) 434-3626 or e-mail: artherner@hotmail.com.

SAINT FRANCIS HOUSE

PO Box 2185
New London, CT 06320

Who are we?

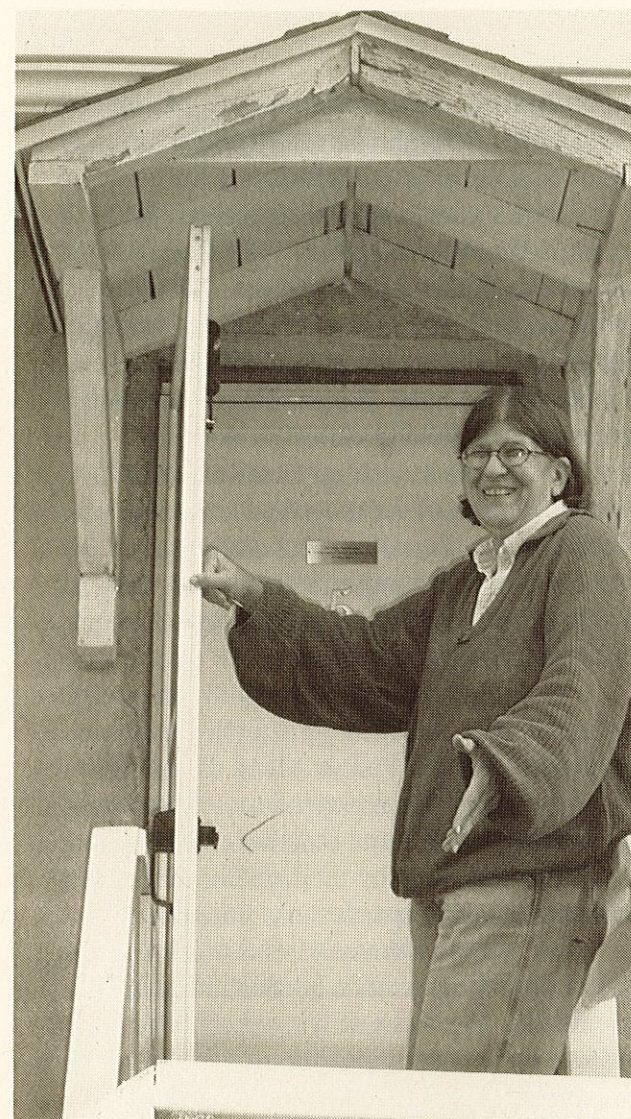
Saint Francis House is an intentional Christian community located in downtown New London, Connecticut. Currently, there are five individuals in residence: The Rev'd Emmett Jarrett, TSSF, Anne Pray Scheibner, and Sarah Jarrett, their daughter, Otis the dog and Cleo the cat occupy the third floor space at 30 Broad Street. The second floor space contains a two-room suite and a guestroom with private bath. Two of the four apartments at 32 Broad Street are occupied, the first floor rear apartment by Mark Auer, and the second floor front apartment by John George Robertson, SSF.

How are we funded?

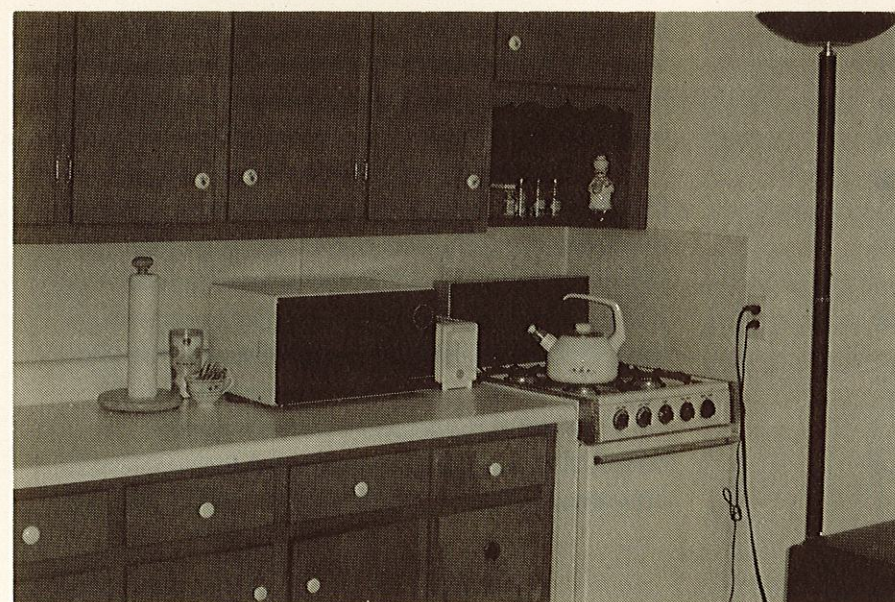
The operation of Saint Francis House is funded entirely by donations. An overwhelming percentage of donations are from individuals, mostly in amounts under \$100. Some folks choose to pledge a set amount per month, ranging from \$10 to \$200. For four years of our existence, the Episcopal Urban Caucus has provided funding in the amount of \$12,000 per year. This funding will cease in March of 2005, as the EUC headquarters moves to a new location. We realize income of approximately \$18,000 per year from residents and the rental of the third floor apartment to an individual not affiliated with SFH. Residents are not paid any wages or salaries and contribute to the community financially.

Where does the money go?

For the fiscal year 2004-2005 we have budgeted approximately \$23,000 for the operation of the houses at 30 and 32 Broad Street. This figure includes taxes, utilities and maintenance. We spend approximately \$17,000 per year for programs such as the Friday night Clarification of Thought meetings and the publication of our quarterly news letter the *Troubadour*. During the last two years, we have spent over \$96,000 to renovate the property at 32 Broad Street. We have a remaining balance of approximately \$90,000 on the mortgage for the house at 32 Broad Street.



Anne welcomes visitors to the Calvary Hermitage which was rehabbed by members of Calvary Church, Stonington and furnished through the bequest of parishioner Dorothea Gould.



Top: View of New London and St. Mary Star of the Sea Church from the Hermitage; Middle - Bedroom looking out onto woods; Lower : Full kitchen and dining area.



"CLOSING THE CHASM"

A Sermon

by the Rev. Michel Belt



"There once was a rich man ..." begins this familiar story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. (Luke 16:19-31) I wonder how such a man, master of all he surveyed, could ever imagine that he might need to listen to the plight of some poor beggar grubbing outside his gates?

But such self-assurance — being convinced of one's God-given right to "lord" it over the misfortunates who "could have worked harder" — is far more dangerous than it might seem at first glance. If the Gospel has one message for us, exemplified in Jesus' being companioned by sinners and "outcasts" — it is that thinking yourself righteous is worse than loitering. Even claims by some Christians to have direct access to the mind and will of God can fall into the category of "rich and at-risk."

Yet to most of us, it seems fairly typical, this arrangement of "haves" and "have-nots." It's the way the world is, a safe bet in virtually every culture and every economic system, for in our hearts we understand the poor could not manage in such a house. They would not know which fork to use. They might bring disease into the house. Their poverty might encourage others like them to move in to the neighborhood. Besides, they probably deserve their lot, just as we deserve ours; ultimately we wish they would go away, beg somewhere else, get a job, straighten up, hopefully vanish.

But then Jesus our storyteller pulls back the curtain and gives us a peek into the hereafter..... Both men, rich and poor alike, died, and their fates veer off as dramatically as they did in their earthly life. On some level, we may be pleased that finally Lazarus is cradled in Abraham's bosom. Good for

him, we declare. He'd suffered enough. But the fate of the rich man makes us squirm a little, or if we're paying attention, a lot.

That's when we start to realize this story isn't about the afterlife. This story is all about this life, and what we do or don't do with our wealth. The story clearly implies that if you ignore the poor, you will go to hell. To follow Christ you are forbidden to indulge yourself behind closed doors. To follow Christ you have to get excited about the redistribution of wealth. And we'd like to explain away the rich man to shelter ourselves from association with anyone who ends up in hell. Fortunately, there are several tempting strategies.

We may say Jesus was strong on spiritual matters, but he obviously never studied economics. We can't feed all the poor. Making the poor dependent on charity only ruins whatever hope they have of pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps. Simply put, Jesus is unrealistic.

Or, we can blame the victim.

Lazarus should have made his need known more clearly. He was just lying there when he should have been knocking on the Rich Man's door. The Rich Man could no doubt argue, "Had I known he was out there ..." But the Rich Man is aware; he knows Lazarus' name — but even if he didn't, we must ask why his doors are slammed shut so tightly. Why isn't he venturing out, looking around him to see what needs to be done? Why today, do some of us rest securely in the suburbs, or gated communities, or in barred apartments?

What Jesus says is true. Life with God is imperceptibly spiraling, even now, toward a shocking reversal of fortunes. When the kingdom of God dawns, the rich will be bereft of all goods, and the poor will live in palaces. Which means the way we're currently living, we've got it upside down.

And still we get so very bogged down, so accustomed to our upside-downness, that we never seem to catch on.

To his shame, this Rich Man is as stuck in his haughty mentality in the torments of hell as he had been in his beautifully appointed villa. He still barks orders: Tell that poor man to bring me some water. Clarence Jordan, in *Cotton Patch Gospel*, got the beggar's reply right, "Lazarus ain't gonna run no mo yo errans, rich man." Perhaps this is hell, being forever stuck, focused in, only on ourselves.

In 1942, Clarence Jordan, having studied agriculture and then theology, attempted a shocking experiment in living the gospel when he founded Koinonia Farm outside Americus, Georgia. Blacks and whites lived together, embodying the kind of community described in Acts, where fellowship (*koinonia* in Greek) meant communal sharing of all goods. Not exactly caught up in gospel fervor, the Ku Klux Klan repeatedly terrorized, bombed, and vandalized Koinonia Farm. And yet its message lived on.

Among those changed by Jordan was Millard Fuller. In November, 1965, Fuller wound up at Koinonia Farm by accident, a successful business man earning a million dollars a year, and trying to save his marriage. When he met Jordan, he said he felt this tremendous heaviness in his chest. Wryly, Jordan suggested that "a million dollars can weigh awfully burdensome on a man."

Fuller divested himself of his entanglement with wealth, he knocked down a huge door that separated him from his fellow humanity. He began hammering away, building new door frames in a ministry he founded called Habitat for Humanity, which has built more than 100,000 homes for the working poor throughout America, and in such far-flung locations as Zaire, Guatemala, Ireland, and Hungary: the opposite of poverty and opposite of wealth — community.

On this earth, we are called to live in community. In this bold experiment in living together, those who once were rich, those

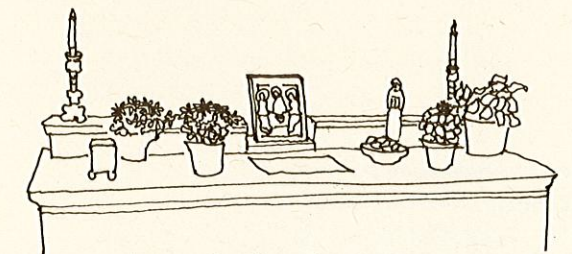
who once were poor; the have and have-nots, together in a bizarre new world where the haves stop having, the have-nots start having, where status is a distant memory, and where we laugh at the slightest hint of somebody feeling superior or getting a leg up.

Instead, we learn by living, sharing, daring, tearing down fences. We discover we are all poor, or rather that we are really all rich, when we study this story together. When rich people read the story, they get squeamish, and dance around its clear intent. When poor people read the story, they stick out their chests, and cast aspersions on whoever has money in the bank. But if we read the story together, we open a door.

You see, the problem is the door, not the wealth, not the poverty, but the door. St. Francis broke down a door in Assisi, returned his father's clothing, and lived joyfully in community with rich and poor, in a humble habit. Mother Teresa heeded Christ's call to serve the poor, and she burst though an ugly door into the slums of Calcutta to find many sisters. Sometimes churches burst through a door to discover new neighbors. Sometimes we're saved — together.

Somebody's waiting on the other side of that door, even now. Is it Christ who is the poor, despised beggar, waiting for us to be generous? Isn't Christ the one who could not be contained by that grave, who has risen from the dead, who pleads with us, who cries out that it's never too late, that the chasm has been closed by God's own love?

The Rev. Michel Belt is Rector of St. James Episcopal Church, New London.



Altar in the Chapel at St. Francis House

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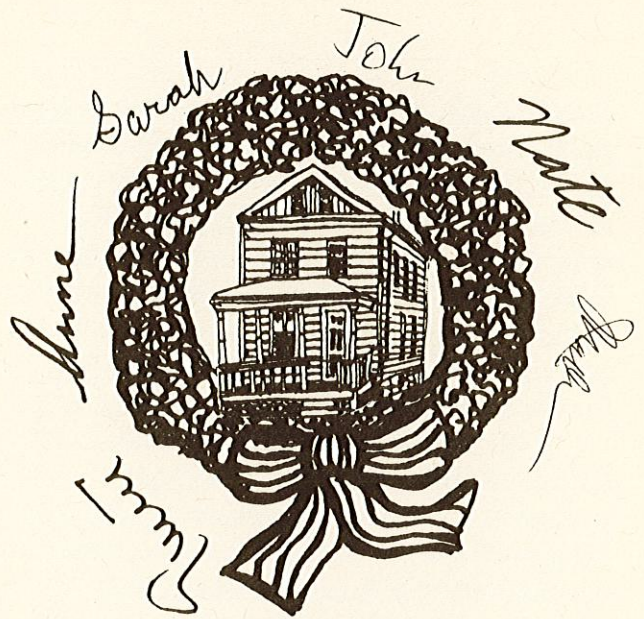
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