

# Sermon: I Challenge You

Delivered by Quinn G.

6/4/23

Good morning.

**\*Good morning\***

Will you pray with me,

Dear God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh God, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

**\*Amen\***

Before I start my sermon today, I would like for all of us, all of Old South Church, to look inwards and ask ourselves: are we privileged? I would daresay that most, if not all of us, are. We have a home with four walls and a roof, that is also heated and maybe even cooled to our whims, and we are able to provide food for those that depend on us. With that in your heads, I would like you all to imagine what your life would be like without those things. Without the financial stability, the guarantee of lunch, the safety of a warm bed, what might your life be like?

Please, for a moment try to imagine what it is like to be homeless. For example, what would it be like to have nowhere to cook a meal? Not even that, but how would you get the ingredients for that meal? Would you beg for it? Or would you go to a shelter or a soup kitchen, never knowing if they have the food or the bed you need?

Imagine never being comfortable. Sitting, and sleeping, outside, all year, on concrete and cardboard. Never relaxing; having to be constantly aware of the people and the possible dangers around you.

Imagine being uncertain when you'll next feel clean or warm. Having no possessions but the clothes that you carry. Imagine being ignored or looked down upon by passers-by or worse still, beaten up.

Imagine the effect that homelessness would have on your mental and physical health. Would you start trying to find a way to distract yourself? Would you start to drink or take drugs just to dull the pain and cure the boredom?

Imagine trying to get a job. At a job interview, you are typically expected to wear nice clothes and to look presentable. Imagine how much harder this is when you don't have access to the resources you need to look the part. On top of that, how would you answer the questions about a mailing or home address? And if you were to get that job, what would you do with your possessions while you are working?

\*Pause\*

I daresay that you don't know the answer to a lot of these questions. The truth is, neither do I.  
But I do know this:

Once you are homeless, especially if you are sleeping rough (which means out on the street), it becomes increasingly hard to "rejoin" society, to get a job, to rent an apartment. As humans, we all feel a need to have a place where we are safe. But a home is not just a roof and four walls, it is the place where we can belong and thrive; somewhere to settle down, earn a living, maybe create a family, and just be part of a community.

Tragically, in 2023 an increasing number of people in Boston do not have a home. Some stay on friends' sofas, or live in a room at a shelter. Others sleep in shop doorways, on public transit, or in tents somewhere.

But homelessness is not a recent problem. It has been around since a controversial rabbi walked the streets of Jerusalem, disrupting the status quo and changing the world. Yes, it is fair to say that Jesus was homeless. This was so well summed up by Matthew 8:20, where Jesus is quoted saying that animals have their nests but the son of man has no place to lay his head. This even dates back to the famous Christmas nativity story, where Jesus had to be laid in a manger! As Christians, we must realize and acknowledge that Jesus, one of the centers of our faith, was homeless!

But let's zoom back into the present. We all know that being homeless has a devastating effect on people's lives, and I'm going to be honest with you, sometimes it feels to me like the world just doesn't care. \*Pause\* I surely cannot be the only one who has walked by a homeless person on the street and thought, "isn't there SOMETHING I can do?" When Emma Lazarus said, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, The wretched refuse... Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me," surely this isn't what she meant? Send them to me and... leave them on the street...? Provide them no support?

Well, together, as a youth group, recently we felt that we should answer that question for ourselves. That we should be doing more. And so, we decided to talk to the executive director of Common Cathedral, Reverend Carrington Moore. Quick side note - I don't know if anyone in this congregation has had the opportunity to volunteer at Common Cathedral, but it was an eye-opening and enjoyable experience when I did it back with my confirmation class, and I would certainly do it again.

In our conversation with Reverend Moore, he spoke a lot about the barriers that stand in a homeless person's way as they try to get off the streets. He stressed that the process of getting off of the streets is multi-layered. There are all the difficult legal and tangible steps to this process, like acquiring housing and documentation, which are no easy feats in and of themselves. But then, even if this person was to get all of that done, there are still the social barriers that are faced too often by the homeless community. Some people may not have a way

to wash their clothes or body, leading to judgment from people who may have access to these services. Also, not having a mailing address that you can receive mail at and put on a document and not having enough or the appropriate clothing may damage the chances of getting a job quite significantly.

Reverend Moore also had very insightful points about the mental load of stress that comes with living unhoused. Personally, I am very fortunate and have never had to worry about where my next meal comes from, but it is a reality that homeless people often face. I cannot even begin to imagine the anxiety it must cause to worry about your nourishment all the time!

Another important observation that came out of our conversation was that we need to recognize our own stigmas against homeless people. Reverend Moore said that he has heard time and time again of this stigma that a person is homeless because they are addicted to a substance of some sort. Often, this isn't true and it is unfair to stereotype homeless people in this way. He also stated that the real reason he believes most people become homeless is that they have simply fallen upon hard times economically and can no longer afford the cost of living, which, as we all know, has shot up astronomically in recent years. While we can say that the system we live in is unsustainable and immoral, it is not enough to just speak about it. We, as Christians, have an obligation to do something to change it.

So this brings us back to the big question: What can we do!?!

And the answer to that is simple - every little thing helps. Examples include supporting outreach organizations like Common Cathedral, the annual Winter Walk or donating to the Pine Street Inn or food banks. In fact, just by pledging to Old South you are helping.

(I know it might not be pledging season right now, but just, keep that in your thoughts. Offering is taken weekly.)

Through pledges and the Christian Service and Outreach Committee's partnership grants, Old South Church is able to provide enduring service throughout the year. That said, individual donations and actions also mean so much. Carrington told us that unhoused people often request clothes - ones they can wear on the street and also ones that look good for work or job interviews. Other ways to help out include volunteering at soup kitchens or food shelters. Additionally, in the bitter New England winters, donating hand warmers, warm hats or gloves would be much appreciated. But the number one requested item is always socks. If you have extra socks, (and I know everyone here has at least 3 pairs they haven't worn in a calendar year just sitting in the drawer,) please consider donating them. And I challenge you to do more. Please do not just sit on your hands and believe that attending a church is enough. Old South, prove me wrong. Show me that the world cares. Because, to paraphrase James 2:15-17, "If a brother or sister is naked or lacks food, and you say to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their needs, what is the good of that?"

What is the good of that?

Above all, I challenge you, Old South Church, to treat everyone, no matter their housing status, humanely. All it takes is kind conversation, eye contact or a smile, or a simple offer of lunch or coffee to make someone's day and restore their faith in humanity.

Jesus challenged us, and challenged the system, not to accept the status quo. He wanted us to see the world through new eyes, eyes of compassion and siblinghood. Old South Church, let's make a difference.

## Benediction: Yours are the hands

To wrap up our worship today, I'd like you all to hear the words of Teresa of Avila, who lived from 1515 to 1582

Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,

yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

**\*Pause\***

Go from this place and make a change in the world. I challenge you, Old South Church. May the blessings of almighty God our creator, and Christ, our brother and savior, be with you this day and every day, and let the whole Church say,

**\*Amen\***

## Scripture Possibilities

Old Testament:

**Deuteronomy 24:21**—“When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.”

Psalm 9:9 The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in time of trouble.

Ezekiel 34:16—“I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak . . . I will feed them with justice.”

Isaiah 58:7 Share your food with the hungry, and provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked clothe them.

Job 31:32 “The stranger has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler.”

New Testament:

**Matthew 8:20** And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

Matthew 25:34 – “for I was hungry and you gave me food, thirst and you gave me something to drink . . . when you did this for the least of these, you did it to me”

Do we want to include the “hell part”?

Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

Galatians 2:10—“They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.”

James 1:27—“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

**James 2:15-17**—“If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?”