

Column

The smell of perked coffee coming from the kitchen, slices of fruitcakes being passed out in the living room on glass plates . . . good conversation following on the matters of the day

. . . such was the way of life around Christmas time when I was growing up. It was called coming round for coffee and cake and was a yearly ritual.

It was a homey affair, nothing elaborate, no great ceremony, just a pleasant way of spending an hour or so with a few friends, often friends from church. A fire usually burned in the fireplace; the mantle was decorated with evergreens and candles; the metallic ice cycles on the 10-foot cedar Christmas tree shimmered. It was the stuff of which memories of a lifetime are made.

Christ's followers witness to their Lord in a variety of ways. Some do so by carrying the Gospel to people in far off lands who have yet to hear it. Others, by working at food banks and missions in their own communities. Still others, by organizing and participating in services of public worship and inviting others to join them.

I think it is safe to say there are as many ways of witnessing to Christ as there are Christian people. We each do it differently and in our own way, but in the end it is the same: 'Christ in me and lived out in me'.

With that said, I want to suggest that one of the loveliest ways we can witness is by following Paul's words in Titus 1:8: "Be a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate."

From the Gospels, we learn that Jesus Himself was the recipient of such hospitality. One place he seems to have received it was at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, located less than two miles outside of Jerusalem. I don't know if there were blazing hearths. coffee and fruitcake in that house, but I am sure warmth and friendship reigned when Jesus came calling, and without a doubt some great conversation took place.

In this time of pandemic I know we must be vigilant that we do no harm. Even so – if we can do so safely – let's not neglect hospitality. Let's be creative and look for way to connect with others and so witness to Christ in a world of separation and fear.

O God, Almighty and merciful, who healest those that are broken in heart, and turnest the sadness of the sorrowful to joy; Let thy fatherly goodness be upon all that thou hast made. Remember in pity such as are this day destitute, homeless, or forgotten of their fellow-men. Bless the congregation of

thy poor. Uplift those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all discouraged and unhappy people, and by thy heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose penury tempteth them to sin; though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they be perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him, who for our sakes became poor, thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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