

The Church



Sunday March 16th, 1980, by all accounts today was a beautiful day. The stunning autumn weather was in full swing as he entered the park, he passed lined trees with the trickery of light illuminating him between the leaves. The softly blowing wind changing the shape and direction of patterns on his face and body. He was beautiful.

A closer look into the man's choice of clothes revealed the dire situation he had found himself in. The man's shoes, two sizes too big, he had visible holes in the bottom of them but only if he elevated his feet. His white shirt, a size too small. He believed his luck had changed when it was found in an alleyway without an owner to claim it. When he found the shirt, it was very close to resembling a 'white' shirt. For him, this was a miracle. The only part of his outfit correct in size were the pair of jeans he wore daily without discomfort. The jeans, provided as a gift by a friend at the beginning of a crazy year. They were the best pants he had ever owned. In fact, now they were the only pants he owned. All else had been lost with the remnants of his previous life.

Beyond his relatively unflattering fashion sense, his general demeanour was that of a depleted and hopeless individual. His steps were slow and laboured, as if his body were made of lead and concrete, but there was life in his arms. Raising and falling like the pendulum of a great grandfather clock, with every step he took. It was early Sunday morning and there was nobody to share the footpath with, he was free of judgement from the outside world for the first time in months.

The feeling of freedom gave the man a hint of what he imagined a little salvation would be like. Little did he know that what was to come, would be something that would deeply wound him. On any given day he could muster the courage to beat what life threw his way, but in his current situation his face reflected all he had, that he was only hanging on by a thread.

For the past eight months he had battled his demons in a healthier way compared to how he had battled them before. He was now sober for almost a year and half. He had previously been known as the homeless drunk on the street.

Whenever families would pass him, parents would cover their children with their bodies. The aim was to avert their eyes from him at all costs, as he stood there in his urine-stained pants with his hand out for money, but he had since changed his ways.

In the last eight months the man had taken an interest in a message of hope, the result of a late-night conversation at a bus stop with an evangelist. Who spoke with him about finding hope and redemption.

He thought back on those nights fondly, as he walked toward his final destination. He found it quite humorous that he didn't even know the Evangelist's name and yet he attributed his new-found hope to him and all that he had to offer.

As he followed his train of thought, he was not aware of where he was going, it just felt like his body had a life of its own. When he finally looked up, he realised that he had been led to the front of a church. It was grand, with a large door that could easily fit 5 men entering at the same time. He took a deep breath; for he had prayed daily for the last eight months but never gained enough courage to seek the source of grace.

He remembered trying desperately to enter similar doors of churches, but he was told that he would be thrown out by the white folk, that weren't accepting of those who were a little different but something strong pulled him here. He felt a connection to this place, an unparalleled peace, there was more that drew him here. He didn't have a word for it, but it was undeniable.

The doors appeared to stare down at him, instilling him with a level of insecurity or fear he hadn't felt in all his time on the streets. He was no stranger to racism, but the fear of being rejected by the very people who had given him hope would cut deep and may not be something he can every recover from.

He took a deep, shaky breath and pushed gently on the double doors of the church, aware of the fact that he would likely interrupt something as everybody had already made their way inside.

Brightness. Something associated with the lord himself, a feeling the man wasn't prepared for, it was like he was blinded the moment he opened the doors as a bright light radiated directly into his eyes. It was only for a moment, but it felt like an eternity.

The room was silent, you could hear a pin drop as the man stood in the doorway, people were seated in rows and now had turned, their gaze fixed on him. His legs shook unsteadily waiting for a reaction.

It wasn't long before the silence was ended. It began with a shout of profanity, followed by another and another, then accompanied by people yelling at the man to leave. He wasn't welcomed here, and they let him know that. His lip quivered, a sombre and defeated apology was all that left him. His pleas unheard by the crowd as objects were thrown in his direction. He hung his head low as he turned and closed the door, not even making it down the first step before collapsing in a heap. He was defeated and praying the lord for something, anything, a miracle to help get him out of there.

He didn't understand why they treated him like this, was it because of his past, being on the streets?

As he sat defeated on the floor, head hanging low and tears rolling down his eyes, he noticed a shadow covering his figure. At first, he raised his hands over his head, cowering, protecting himself from a potential blow. Instead, an outstretched hand gently touched his head. It was the evangelist.

"Not all churches are like this," he began, in a gentle and reassuring tone, one thing you need to know is that "The lord does not discriminate." The Evangelist helped the man to his feet.