

~ Letters to the Editor ~

**Spiritually Speaking**  
Father Thankachan Joseph



**Lent: A Time to Return to The Father**

As our Lenten observances move into the fourth week, the reflection for this week is the parable of the prodigal son, a marvelous parable in Luke (15:11-32) that describes the mercy and compassion of the heavenly Father. I have decided to reflect on the personalities of three persons in the parable.

The Loving Father resembles a modern father who gives in to his children out of love. When the younger boy demands his share of property, the father allows this, for if forced to stay home, home would be a prison for the son.

But the father knows that his son is immature and knows not what he is doing. After the son's premature departure from home, the father waits on his front porch every night, watching the road from the city, hoping that realization will dawn on the son. People who watch him say, "Hey, Mister, you ought to be declared 'Father of the year.'" But the father continues to wait every night until darkness, when he goes to bed saying a tearful prayer for his lost but always dear son, as many parents do these days.

Then one evening, his heart explodes with excitement. He sees a figure coming down the road. He can tell...it is his son coming home! The father runs down the road, his heart pounding, tears of relief rolling down his cheeks. He hugs his boy tightly, his sobs of joy shaking his body. The boy says something about not being worthy to come home as a son, asking only to hire on as a field worker. The father hears nothing of this. His heart says, "I do not care where you have been or what you have done. All I care about is that you are home, and I love you!" He does not wait to hear what the son has done with his wealth, does not bother with what is lost. He is happy that he has back his lost son. Here we have a beautiful example of heavenly love, care and affection that transcends human love.

The Older Son: How wonderful it would have been if the older son had said, "O, how glad I am! The fact that my brother has come home shows that he has changed. I have missed him so much. I have prayed for his return. I have shared with Father concern for his safety. I must hurry to embrace him."

But he lacks concern and brotherly love: "The way my father treated my younger brother was a slap on my face." When his brother returns, the older son feels the need to share, fears losing the castle he has built in his dreams, enjoying everything by himself alone.

The Prodigal Son: The younger son feels that he has outgrown his father and wants no part of his father's lifestyle or home. He asks his father to give to him the portion of the estate that he would inherit upon his father's death. He thinks he will be happier away from home, for he would no longer be under parental control, which seems the how many present-day youngsters feel.

The far country promised freedom but actually enslaved the young man. While his money lasted, he had some fair-weather friends, but when the money ran short, he was reduced to deprivation. He hired out to a gentile to feed the gentile's swine and ended up eating animal food.

It was under such misery that he thought of his parents and home. He thought, "The hired servants at home fare well. Father is a good man. I will go back to him, confess my sin, and ask him to accept me as a hired servant."

To come back home was no easy job. It called for a lot of humility and courage. He knew what people were thinking and saying about him. But his conviction and contrition lead him back home.

Some people are lost like sheep, losing their way by careless drifting. Some, through life's circumstances, are misplaced like a lost coin. Others, like the young son, are lost through willful rebellion. Still others are lost as the older brother was—at home yet far from the father, full of hate, self-righteousness, prejudice, envy and unforgiveness.

When a sheep is found, the shepherd rejoices; when a coin is found, the woman rejoices; when a son is found, the father rejoices; when a sinner repents, God rejoices. Now is the day of salvation.

The Heppner Gazette Times will print all letters to the Editor with the following criteria met: letters submitted to the newspaper will need to have the name of the sender along with a legible signature. We are also requesting that you provide your address and a phone number where you can be reached. The address and phone number will only be used for verification and will not be printed in the newspaper. Letters may not be libelous. The GT reserves the right to edit. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under "Card of Thanks" at a cost of \$16 Email to editor@rapidsolve.net or upload to Heppner.net.

**Local Support Important in Local Healthcare**

We are navigating through a time of great change in healthcare, and though uncertainty surrounds us, we are filled with hope and determination to continue serving our community. The healthcare system has faced many challenges, and while recovery from the COVID pandemic is ongoing, we remain committed to strengthening the care we provide at Morrow County Health District.

With many changes being discussed at both the state and federal levels, now, more than ever, local support plays a crucial role in ensuring that we can continue to offer vital services to our community.

Over the past three years, we've been focused on implementing a strategic plan to help us strengthen services, improve access for our patients, and make sure that each area of our county is served in the most effective and thoughtful way. A key part of this journey has been refining the model we use to provide services at our clinics.

In this post-COVID world, it's essential that we continue to operate efficiently while keeping care affordable. We've implemented new staffing models and workflows that help us serve more patients while reducing costs, and we're seeing positive results. In 2022, we were able to open Boardman Immediate Care to provide same day care options. During the FY 23-24 period, we saw 2,990 more patient visits across the clinics than in the years prior to implementing our new clinic model.

We're also thrilled to report a significant boost in patient satisfaction scores, a true testament to the hard work of our dedicated team. You can learn more about our clinic performance by visiting our website at healthmc.org.

We're currently recruiting and interviewing candidates for a full-time physician for Pioneer Memorial Clinic and a full-time physician assistant or nurse practitioner for Irrigon Medical Clinic. In addition, we are working with the National Office of Rural Health to explore options to expand services in Boardman and Irrigon.

At Pioneer Memorial Hospital, we're investing in improvements to ensure we continue to offer the best care possible, including the scheduled replacement of our CT machine and planning for better ADA accessibility and private patient bathrooms.

To ensure we are continuing to meet the needs of our community, we are launching a community survey this week to gather valuable insights on patient access and service utilization. Your feedback is essential in helping us shape the next phase of our strategic planning.

We are grateful for your continued support and look forward to hearing from you. Together, we will continue to build a healthier future for Morrow County today and toMORROW.

Emily Roberts  
MCHD CEO  
Heppner, OR

**Priorities Need to Change at MCHD**

Letter to the editor,  
After being approached by both sides of MCHD (Morrow County Health District) to get involved, I have communicated and listened to: three MCHD board members (Diane Kilkenny, Scott Ezell and Steven Munkers), CEO Emily Roberts, two past MCHD board members (John Murray and Aaron Palmquist), Dr. Russ Nichols, Dr. Emily Jack, Danielle Mateleska (prior MCHD PA), past MCHD CEO Bob Houser, current MCHD lab techs and lower level administrators, and others.

The result: 1) MCHD has dedicated employees that love their job and love living in Morrow County, 2) MCHD is a house divided and 3) Virtually every person warned MCHD is very close to collapse.

In a nutshell, MCHD is the Titanic about to hit an iceberg. When that happens, MCHD will lose four health clinics, home health, hospice, ambulance protection for the south end and Irrigon, and Pioneer Memorial Hospital.

MCHD will lose 200 jobs, half that live in South Morrow County. South end residents dependent on health care, will be forced to move closer to their care providers. Heppner and some south-end businesses will be devastated. Innocent people, like on the Titanic, will be cast into ominous waters.

Every MCHD clinic has only one PA or NP medical provider. According to the Gazette-Times, Pioneer Memorial had seven patients averaging 2.1 days in the hospital in January.

The majority of those I spoke with testified that MCHD has to change direction to avoid the present course of impending disaster. That means a change in the direction of leadership in the MCHD board and administration.

The priority of that change? Health care for patients must be the priority. Healing the breach that is dividing our citizens must be the priority. Bringing doctors, nurses, medical professionals that want to work and live in the communities they serve must be the priority. A fresh vision of how to bring prosperity in numbers and quality to health care in Morrow County must be the priority.

Traveling doctors, nurses, medical professionals, can be tools but are *not* the answer. Heppner has two doctors and one PA that live in Heppner and work over an hour away, taking their patients with them. This is untenable and unacceptable if health care and financial health is our priority.

MCHD is funded by tax funds from the citizens of Morrow County and patients that use MCHD. These citizens are owners of MCHD. When they speak the Board and Administration must heed or the ship is going to sink.

Stuart Dick  
Irrigon, OR

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**EMS Thoughts**

Sometimes in the EMS world, you have days that stick with you, like it or not. I remember a day when we had a particularly bad call. It wasn't easy and it hit me hard...and it still does. Working in EMS can put some pretty unpleasant things into view. I've seen trauma ... "blood n' guts" ... and death. You never know how it will affect you. Sometimes, I'm surprised by my reaction...or even the lack of. Then I wonder why I'm not bothered more. While I do have a rather strong stomach and I am a bit of a trauma/training junkie, I just chalked it up to a sort of disconnect for the purpose of self-preservation. It's an ability to do my job in controlled chaos.

So what makes the calls you can't shake? Often the hardest calls aren't the ones we might think. One call that stuck with me didn't end in death and didn't involve any gore. But it was an event that would change a young life forever. It's the one I think about that tears at my heart the most.

So I've come to the conclusion that it's the human element that gets me. It's doing everything I can, bringing all the different aspects of my training together, performing to the best of my ability and I still can't direct the outcome. Those calls make me sad. They frustrate me and they make me feel vulnerable. My first response isn't to walk away feeling proud that I've done all I could. It's to walk away thinking of any possible way I could have done better. While it's not a warm and fuzzy feeling, it is a necessary feeling, and one that hopefully will benefit the next patient and make the next call go more smoothly.

I believe the Good Lord makes the ultimate decision as to which patient makes it and which doesn't. He also gives us the skills and the privilege to hopefully make the process a little easier. One thing I've learned through it all is that when emergencies happen, our priorities get rearranged pretty quickly. It makes me think of a patient who was having trouble breathing. Between short, difficult breaths, he said, "Where is my family?" All I could think of was to say, "I'm sure they're on their way." They weren't. And a few days later, he breathed his last without any goodbyes.

I've heard the saying "Live like it's your last day on Earth." Good words... but I wonder how things would change if we lived like it was someone else's last day on earth. What if you knew you were about to lose someone...how would you treat them? Would you still be angry, offended, annoyed or indifferent? Last days come to all of us. So whatever's eating you... let it go. Make some good memories with your loved ones. Love 'em like you mean it.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:1-7).

Susie Crosby  
Prineville, OR

**Good People Like Rhea are Hard to Find**

Dear Heppner Gazette Editor,

I was pleased to read that Molly Rhea is running for MCHD (Morrow County Health District) board.

All voters in the MCHD should be concerned by what is happening in rural healthcare in our country. As hospital administrator, I worked with Molly for almost 10 years. I know there is no one better in the county than Molly to be a MCHD board member. She is forward-looking, compassionate, caring and customer-service oriented. Molly has the right balance for MCHD. She is committed to the residents of the county.

After I retired I came back four times as interim administrator. Molly was always there, and I could trust what she said to help me, the hospital and the district. She is ethical and makes well-informed decisions.

Over 40 years I have worked with a lot of nurses, doctors and board members. Retired nurses make great hospital board members. Good people like Molly are hard to find.

Thank You,  
Victor VanderDoes

**Celebrating Community Spirit in Heppner**

What a joy it was to experience Heppner's St. Patrick's Day parade! I've always appreciated the camaraderie a good parade brings, but Heppner's celebration truly stands out as one of the best I've attended. Initially, I thought the entire town had come out just to watch, but I quickly realized how many more were active participants. From candy being enthusiastically tossed to the cheerful sounds of bands and sirens, the energy was infectious.

To fully embrace the festivities, I donned a bright green Heppner hoodie and joined in the fun, waving and cheering with the crowd. The sense of connection and community pride was inspiring. It reminded me of the power of small towns to come together, not just for joy-filled events like this but also to support one another during life's most challenging moments.

As the Pioneer Memorial Home Health and Hospice medical director, I've witnessed firsthand how this community rallies to care for its own. Whether it's providing comfort at the end of life or celebrating the vibrancy of living, Heppner exemplifies the strength and resilience of rural communities. Events like the St. Patrick's Day parade shine a light on the passion this town has for its businesses, families and children.

Being here has deepened my admiration for Heppner, and I feel fortunate to play a small part in a town that values both its history and its future.

Christine Seals, MD  
Family Medicine Physician

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:  
**MONDAY AT 5:00 P.M.**

**Seniors Matter March/April Menu**

**March 11,** - Burrito Bar, Dessert

**March 18,** Pork Roast, Potatoes with, buttered corn and Dessert

**March 25** - Italian Tomato Soup, Salad, Dessert

**April 1** - Chili Relleno, Refried Beans, Cinnamon, Rolls, Peaches

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**Lunch & Dinner Menu**  
3/27 - 4/2

**Thursday** - Philly steak fajita with tortilla chips

**Friday** - Fish sandwich with deep fried chips

**Saturday** - Grilled cheese burger with cup of chili

**Sunday** - closed

**Monday** - sausage egg and cheese breakfast burrito with hashbrown patties.

**Tuesday** - Teriyaki chicken rice bowl

**Tuesday Night** 6-9pm \$2 hard shell tacos

**Wednesday** - Flat bread sausage pizza and salad