

Inside this issue:

- A View from Here 02
- A peek at Christmas at Sanctuary 03
- The Shelter Crisis 04
- Meet Our New Staff 04
- Reflections on the First Four Beatitudes 05
- Christmas and New Year's Eve at Sanctuary 05
- Ways to Help 06

CITY OF REFUGE

You're Invited

Join us at Sanctuary on **March 2nd, 2018** for the *Resurrecting Religion Book Launch and Art Show!*

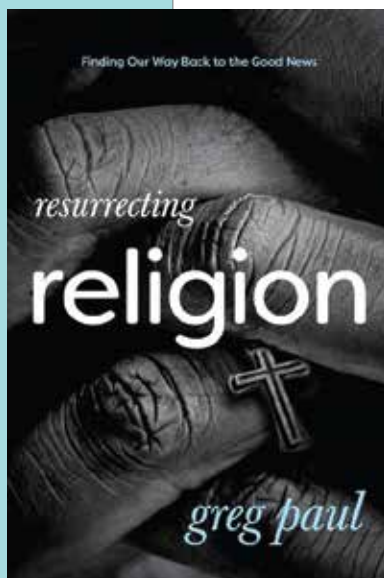
Come hear readings from the book, and enjoy art and performances from the Sanctuary community.

Art Show from 4:30pm-6:30pm

Performances, Readings and Book Launch from 6:30pm-9:00pm

To learn more about *Resurrecting Religion*, you can visit resurrectingreligion.com or follow Greg Paul's author page on Facebook.

See Sanctuary's website or Facebook page for more information about the launch event.



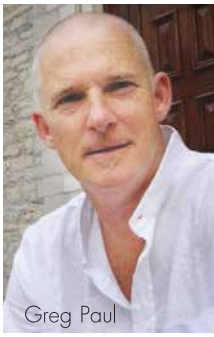
BEATITUDES EDITION

Our beloved pastoral director Greg Paul has published a new book that speaks powerfully about our community life here at Sanctuary. The boldly titled *Resurrecting Religion* combines stories from Sanctuary with reflections on the Beatitudes and James' epistle to urge us to pursue true religion: active and communal work for justice for the weak and marginalized, and love for the vulnerable and outcast. It is also an urgent reminder that the work of love and justice to which all Christians are called cannot be done in isolation.

To celebrate the release of *Resurrecting Religion*, this edition of City of Refuge is focused on the Beatitudes—a series of blessings spoken by Jesus as part of his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12). Not only are these blessings essential to understanding what Greg calls “true religion,” the way of life taught by Jesus, it's also an eminently appropriate lens for reflecting on our work and community life here at Sanctuary.

We strive to be a Beatitudes community: a place where the poor and poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are honoured and blessed.

In “A View from Here,” Greg shares the story of a friend in mourning, and uses the Beatitudes to explain his friend's place in God's Kingdom. Greg Cook, one of our outreach workers, provides critical insight into the ways that our governments and institutions are currently failing the city's most vulnerable residents in “The Shelter Crisis.” This piece was originally delivered in a slightly different form to officials at Toronto City Hall, where Greg spoke truth to power to demand that our city live up to a Beatitudes vision of justice. We're also honoured to share some reflections on the Beatitudes from members of Sanctuary's Wednesday Bible Study group, led by Rachel Tulloch. Finally, we have some stories and pictures from our Christmas celebrations at Sanctuary, which are a testament to the power of a loving community that aspires to live up to the call of the Beatitudes.



Greg Paul

The View From Here

A good friend of mine – I consider him a brother, really – blew up outside the community meal at Sanctuary last night. He'd been drinking a lot, and although he's usually a mild-mannered soul, he became downright obstreperous. He kept saying, "I'm going in hot", by which he meant he intended to force his way into the drop-in space and cause a ruckus. When he realized he wouldn't be able to get past us, he flung himself down on the step in front of the main entrance and refused to move. It was a "protest," he claimed. Never did say what, exactly, he was protesting.

He blustered and threatened a fair bit, but it was all a little half-hearted. At one point, when he was back on his feet, he calmed for a moment, looked carefully at the two of us staff people barring his way, and said to each of us in turn, "I know you."

He didn't mean he hadn't recognized us before and now did, or that he vaguely recalled who we are. He meant, "I know you. I know your hearts. I know who you really are."

Not long after that, right in the midst of some tough-guy posturing, his face crumpled, and his mouth opened wide in a silent wail. "I lost my girl," he said. "I loved her, and I lost my girl." You could see the grief rise up and overwhelm him like a flood.

Thus far, I could be telling a story about one of any number of my Sanctuary brothers and sisters. The same would hold true if I went on to say that the girlfriend who died a tragic street-involved death was not the first he'd lost; that most of his siblings have died on the street; that he's never really had a home; that his health is precarious; that trauma has hunted him from the time he was a child, with addictions following like sharks tracing blood in the water.

Here's what Jesus said about people like my brother:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.¹

The Beatitudes are the Charter of the Kingdom of God. Those who they describe, the Beatitudes People, are at the very centre of that kingdom, the recipients of Jesus' promised "blessedness". My brother and many others like him in our community are very much like the crowd that heard Jesus speak those powerful words on the hillside – "the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics".

Here's what I think they understood Jesus to mean:

Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt, for all the riches of the kingdom are available to bail them out. Blessed are those whose life is a litany of loss and destruction, and who are so blasted by grief they cannot stand, for they will find a new and strengthening intimacy among others who grieve and with the Comforter by their side. Blessed are the shoved out, put down, and ripped off, for they will discover that everything—everything!—belongs to them and nothing can restrain them. Blessed are those who are starving for justice, dying of thirst for someone to treat them right, for a feast is coming.²

Yes, my brother ticks all those boxes. It's hard to see blessedness in him right now. I'm pretty sure he doesn't see it or feel it at all, and yet, even in the midst of his struggles, he's an incredibly faithful seeker after God. It's his tenderness that has allowed him to be so deeply wounded.

The complete fulfillment of these words of Jesus is, I suppose, for a coming day. I long for it. I believe they declare his intention to ultimately effect the perfect justice of the kingdom of God – to not only forgive my brother (and me!) of wrongs done and hurts inflicted, but to right the wrongs and heal the hurts done to him.

That's gospel. Let's live it.

¹Matthew 5:3-6

²From "Resurrecting Religion", NavPress 2018, p 203

A peek at Christmas at Sanctuary



The Shelter Crisis

An edited portion of a deputation delivered by Greg Cook to Toronto City Hall

A big part of my job as an outreach worker is to come alongside people who are in crisis. I endeavor to listen well, offer a respectful and safe space to problem solve, and offer options. As a result of the current housing and shelter crisis in Toronto, 95% of the time I feel like I'm helping people choose the "least bad option" amongst numerous catastrophic choices.

One example of a "least bad option" this winter has been to offer a sleeping bag or toque to people who are homeless due to the overcapacity of the shelter and winter respite systems. A sleeping bag is a bad option compared to the option of a safe, warm bed. Yet it's not as bad as freezing to death.

If we add the number of respite spaces to the shelter bed capacity, we can confidently say that the shelter occupancy rate in Toronto has been between 104% - 110% from mid-December to mid-January. Steve Meagher has done some important math on this - "As Toronto considers adding 1,000 new emergency shelter beds, here's some scary math... Last night 6,345 individuals required emergency shelter in Toronto. The total number of emergency shelter beds available in Toronto last night was 5,896. Now take away the 1,519 temporarily contracted motel beds, and the total number of permanent shelter beds available in the city last night was 4,377. To reach 90% occupancy and ensure the safety of our most vulnerable residents, Toronto needs 7,050 permanent shelter beds.

In summary: 7,050 shelter beds (what's required) minus 4,377 shelter beds (what we have now) equals 2,673 shelter beds (what we still need)."

This crisis in our housing and shelter system is costing lives. This year over 80 people died without housing in our city according to City of Toronto data. As an outreach worker, I have been endeavoring to do some outreach work to our city councillors. Their decisions on this matter; they are a matter of life and death.

From my perspective, Toronto can choose to continue to go down the trajectory I'll call the Los Angeles model. Los Angeles isn't much bigger than Toronto. Yet on any given night it's homeless population is 57,800. Only 26% are in shelters. Under this model, violence against homeless women has been catastrophically high, and the rate of homelessness among the elderly has risen significantly.

Or this City Council can strike out on a different trajectory. I'll call this the Toronto 1980's model. I say this because I want to emphasize that we can do much, much better. We need tens of thousands of affordable housing units. However, we also need to be realistic in our current political climate about the immediate, critical needs. Right now we need warm beds in our city. We need the Fort York Armouries open. We need the current respite centres to stay open until better options are available. In the short term we need 1,500 new shelter beds built this year. It would be criminal to push more people out into the cold.

Meet Our New Staff!

Sam Sundar-Singh, a long-time member of the Sanctuary community, has been heading-up our Sunday services for just over two years (it's been a while since we've introduced the newbies!), enriching Sanctuary with his musical gifts, servant leadership, and signature humour.

Kathleen Smith joined the team as Donor Relations Coordinator in August. A regular at Sanctuary's Sunday gatherings, she previously worked in policy and program management with the Ontario government and is thrilled to be serving the Sanctuary community.

Last but not least, our new Nurse Practitioner Josephine (Jo) Poon started in September. Between her experience in a community health centre, and her caring, thoughtful approach to her work, Jo has been a fantastic addition to our clinic.



Sam serenading us at our Christmas feast



Kathleen (left) and Jo (right) at our Christmas feast

Reflections **First** on the **Four** **Beatitudes**

By: *The Wednesday Bible Study group*

Through his words and his life, Jesus gives us a glimpse of a strange and wonderful world that looks nothing like the world we know:



Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit...

The ones the world calls crazy because they do not accommodate to the world's craziness. They act strange but they are special to God.

Those who have been eaten by the world. The world feeds off our spirits and we have lost the ancient wisdom of how to replenish.

The ones who know their own brokenness and the rest of us learn to see ours because of their vulnerability.

Blessed are Those who Mourn...

For those who have died too soon, too sad, too violent.

For lost relationships, lost years, lost children.

For the disconnection we feel and long to overcome.

Blessed are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Justice...

While some of us merely want justice or even make gestures toward it, others crave it.

They feel the stinging pain of its absence because it has left them, literally, hungry.

They need it because the way the world is set up threatens their life.

Blessed are The Meek...

They are not usually the ones who inherit the earth. They are usually the ones who are trampled by those seeking to conquer the earth.

The smallest things have effects we cannot see - even butterflies' wings can affect the weather.

The meek are the ones who very quietly go one way while everyone else goes another.

In the world Jesus invites us to, these are the ones who own the kingdom of God, inherit the earth, find comfort, and have their deepest desires fulfilled. In our little community, these are the ones who teach us most about God.

Christmas and New Year's Eve at Sanctuary

By: *Sam Sundar-Singh*



This year Christmas and New Year's Eve fell on Sunday. We don't usually have a Christmas or New Year's Eve service, but this year it happened to work out.

As expected, the numbers were small. On Christmas Eve, instead of the usual setup, we gathered in a smaller intimate circle with my acoustic guitar and sang songs of comfort, hope and promise. A few of the Sunday Community read passages, and lit the final Advent candles. We all participated in Communion, and closed the time with communal prayer.

It was a soft landing place and connection to loving community for those for whom the Christmas season is very difficult. Sanctuary is a safe place where we can all be as open and honest as we'd like about the pain and struggles we all face.

For this I am eternally grateful.



Board Members

Alison Marthinsen, *Board Director*

Merv Mercer, *Board Director*

Drew Badgley, *Board Director*

Grace Cheng, *Chairperson*

Bruce Gooding, *Board Treasurer*

Janice Towndrow, *Board Director*

Cindy Quinton, *Board Director*

Ted Smith, *Board Director*

Joanna Moon, *Board Director*

Ways to Help

Pray, pray, pray!

Donate:

By credit card: donate.sanctuarytoronto.ca/

Monthly by electronic funds transfer use the form at www.sanctuarytoronto.ca/forms/PAGform.pdf

By cheque or money order payable to Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto
Mail to 25 Charles Street East, Toronto, ON M4Y 1R9

For US Donors, by cheque or money order payable to First Church of the Nazarene
Mail to Sanctuary c/o Radical Mission, 150 Richview Road, Clarksville, TN 37043
Attn: Leighanne Guthrie

Tax receipts will be issued at year end. Funds given in excess of an approved or discontinued program will be applied at the discretion of the Board.

Charitable #89037 9340 RR 0001

Donate A Car Canada! Sanctuary can benefit from your donation of any kind of vehicle (cars, trucks, vans, SUVs, motorcycles, boats, RVs) to be recycled in an environmentally friendly manner! Not only that, but also, if you have a newer or estate vehicle that you would like to donate, they have selling agents to assist in maximizing your donation. Simply go to www.donatecar.ca or call them at 1-877-250-4904.

Other Ideas: **Raise awareness** by showing this newsletter to your friends and family.

Commemorate special people and occasions by donating to Sanctuary 'in honour of...'

Sign-up to receive newsletters and invitations via email by contacting info@sanctuarytoronto.ca

Invite Sanctuary to speak at your church, school or group meeting.

25 Charles Street East, Toronto, ON M4Y 1R9

T: 416 922 0628 F: 416 922 4961

E: info@sanctuarytoronto.ca

[SANCTUARY]

www.sanctuarytoronto.ca