

Ordinary 13A - 2026

Self-Doubt: Burning on the Bottom of the Pan

I remember an old story about a kindergarten teacher wrote a song about popcorn and then had her class crouch down on the floor as they sang it. At the appropriate point in the song, all the children would "pop up." The teacher had them "popping" all over the classroom. One day, during the popcorn song, the teacher noticed that one little boy remained crouched down when all the other children popped up. "What's wrong?" the teacher asked. "Why aren't you 'popping' like the other children?" The little boy replied, "Cause I'm burning on the bottom of the pan." Some of us are like that little boy. We feel like we are burning on the bottom of the pan. We feel like we have no worth as persons. (by Billy D. Strayhorn from *How God Gets His Kicks*)

The Tool of Discouragement

There is an old legend about Satan one day having a yard sale. He thought he'd get rid of some of his old tools that were cluttering up the place. So, there was gossip, slander, adultery, lying, greed, power-hunger, and more laid out on the tables. Interested buyers were crowding the tables, curious, handling the goods. One customer, however, strolled way back in the garage and found on a shelf a well-oiled and cared-for tool. He brought it out to Satan and inquired if it was for sale. "Oh, no!" Satan answered. "That's my tool. Without it I couldn't wreck the church! It's my secret weapon!" "But what is it?" the customer inquired. "It's the tool of discouragement," the devil said. In the text Jesus is talking to the church about their attitude and deportment toward the prophets God sends among us as shepherds. He speaks frankly about acceptance and rejection, about kindness and trust. In short, he promises that in the minister's success among us shall come our own reward (by Stephen M. Crotts and Stan Purdum from *Sermons For Sundays: After Pentecost (First Third): Hidden In Plain View*, CSS Publishing Company, Inc.)

Whoever Welcomes You, Welcomes Me

Recently I was sent this story. The author said, I saw him in the church building for the first time on Wednesday. He was in his mid-70's with thinning silver hair and a neat brown suit. Many times in the past I had invited him to come. Several other Christian friends had talked to him about the Lord and had tried to share the good news with him. He was well respected, honest, a man of good character. He acted much like a Christian would act, but he never came to church or professed Christ. After I got to know him well and we had talked about a wide range of subjects I asked him if he had ever been to a church service. He hesitated. Then with a twisted grimace told me of an experience he had as a boy. He was raised in a large family. His parents survived the depression but they struggled to

provide food and clothing for the family. When he was around ten years old a friend invited him to go to church with his family. He went - the Sunday School class was great. The songs were fun to sing and the stories, oh the great Bible stories, were exciting to hear. He had never heard anyone read from the Bible before. As class ended the teacher pulled him aside and said, "Son, please don't come again dressed as you are now. We want to look our best when we come into God's house." He looked down at his old hand me down overalls that were certainly worn and tattered. He thought about that for a moment and said softly, "No ma'am I won't ever." Then he looked at me, the author wrote and said, "And you know what... I never did." It was clear that he was done with that conversation.

The author reflected, I am sure that the Sunday School teacher meant well and in fact was representing the feeling of the majority of the folks in that church. But what if, what if she had put her arms around the dirty little boy in the ragged overalls and said, "Son, I am thrilled that you came this morning and I hope you will come every chance you get to hear more about Jesus because he loves you so much." Moreover, what if she would have talked with her pastor or her friends in the church and mobilized a full-blown outreach effort to help this family make ends meet. What if that church would have thought, whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Or whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple will receive a great reward (v. 40 & 42)

The story ended like this: Yes, I saw him in the church house for the first time on Wednesday and I cried as I looked at the immaculately dressed old gentleman lying there in his casket. He was looking his best. But all I could think of were those words of an impressionable little ten-year-old boy echoing in my mind, "No ma'am I won't ever." (by David Wiggs from *Who Needs a Welcome?*)

Shrinking and growing angel:

The Russian author Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a shoemaker who was making his way home one night when he found a poor man shivering and poorly clad. Moved by pity, the shoemaker took the man home. His wife was not pleased. She complained about the cost of feeding another mouth. As she continued to complain, the stranger grew smaller and smaller, shriveled and wrinkled with every unkind word. But when she spoke kindly to the stranger and gave him food, he grew and became more beautiful. The reason was that the stranger was an angel from Heaven in human form and could live only in an atmosphere of kindness and love. [Fulton J. Sheen, *The Power of Love* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964).] Fr. Tony (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>)