

REFLECTIONS

November 5, 2006

He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

John 21:16 NKJV

Essence of Caring

Mitch and Mark drove to see their dying friend. Kirk's mom had called the brothers to tell them to hurry because he would not live much longer. As they drove they felt so helpless. What would they say? What *could* they say? Before reaching Kirk's home, Mitch pulled to the side of the road. "Mark, let's just stop and pray."

They paused to pray for their friend; but mostly they paused to pray for themselves. They prayed to overcome their own helplessness.

We have all felt helpless when confronted by irreversible situations in the lives of those we care for. It is much easier to go to them when we can bring answers. But when we can bring nothing!—well, it is easier to just simply stay home and rationalize that "there is nothing I can do." But there is. We can bring ourselves.

Henri Nouwen explains it this way:

...when we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing, and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares...¹

Mitch and Mark brought themselves. As uncomfortable as it was, all they could really do for their friend was just be there. In the silence, Mark began to remember old times that were not so good; and then he shared his own brokenness. Mark immersed himself in the pain of his own suffering, of a time in his life when, like Kirk, he was powerless too. And in his suffering and powerlessness, he turned to God for help. There he found the healing grace of Jesus Christ.

As Mark shared the poverty of his own suffering and completed his story of healing, a tear glistened on Kirk's cheek. He did not speak, but Kirk had found the healing grace of Jesus Christ. And his final breath was blessed with peace.

Friends don't bring answers. Friends bring themselves. It is the essence of caring. It is the essence of tending God's sheep.

"You are the light of the world."

Richard +

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¹ *Out of Solitude* by Henri J.M. Nouwen © 1974, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana

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Your comments are welcomed and encouraged. Richard may be reached at richard@reflectingthesavior.org.