

Charity Case

by Paul Holte

FOCUS:

And they shall say, "Lord when did we see thee...?"

SCENE:

A city park. A bench is heavily strewn with newspapers. The woman enters. She is a society matron, rich with jewels and obviously out of place in this setting.

•••••

Woman: Why! Why he insisted on meeting me in this place...oh, dear. *(checks the time)* I hate being the first to arrive. *(starts to clear a place to sit; the papers stir)* Good heavens, it's alive!

Man: *(Rises from beneath the pile. He is splendidly tattered and dirty.)* Huh?

Woman: Ah, it's only a bum.

Man: Is it morning already?

Woman: My good man, I realize this is a public park...

Man: Is that where I am?

Woman: ...but would you please excuse us.

Man: Why? What have you done?

Woman: *(smiling thinly)* I mean, leave.

Man: *(looking around)* "Us"?

Woman: I'm expecting someone shortly.

Man: Oh.

Woman: A gentleman.

Man: Ah!

Woman: We have a meeting scheduled here, an organizational meeting.

Man: Sure... just the two of you... in the park.

Woman: Yes, he insisted... Listen, it's none of your business, so why don't you just run along? I'm sure you wouldn't find it at all interesting.

Man: Oh, I don't know. Maybe I would.

Woman: This is a preliminary planning session to discuss strategies for a major charity drive.

Man: Charity!

Woman: And you'd only be in the way. Now go!

Man: Lady, I'm starting to think you don't like me.

Woman: On the contrary, my good man. I've devoted my life to helping the poor and underprivileged. Why, the results of our meeting today should eventually be of great benefit to you people.

Man: Happy day! You're here to help me!

Woman: Why, yes, I suppose you could say that.

Man: All right, then. Give!

Woman: Don't be absurd! I don't give handouts to individuals.

Man: But I'm hungry...

Woman: Then go to the soup kitchen. See, we have places for people like you.

Man: I thought you said you were going to help me.

Woman: I will help you best through the charitable organizations I'm involved with.

Man: You don't really care, do you?

Woman: I care! No one in this city cares more than I do about the charities! And I believe in making my money do the most good for the most people. That's why I work through these organizations!

Man: Yeah, I know. You "gave at the office."

Woman: That is a cheap shot! Why, I can't be stopping for every bum on the street...

Man: Oh, break my heart. So what'll you do instead? Throw us a big charity ball?

Woman: Well, that's one of the...

Man: Listen, sister, charity isn't a ball! It's a sacrifice! It means giving up something important, not throwing sops to the beggars to ease your conscience!

Woman: I beg your pardon!

Man: Well, you don't have it!

Woman: I don't have to stand for hits! *(starts to go)*

Man: *(pursuing her)* See? You think you're so big-hearted, but you really don't have the stomach for this, do you? You want to do your "Christian duty," but you don't want to get your hands dirty. Well, look, lady, you may be rich in rhinestones, but you're poor in spirit!

Woman: *(This stops her.)* Are you quite through?

Man: Charity! You, lady, are a miser—a miser of the heart. *(Pause. She is taken aback.)* Just who do you think is the truly needy here, sister?

Woman: *(She makes an abrupt decision.)* I see. How much do you need? *(She opens her pocketbook, hands him several large bills.)* I trust that will be sufficient?

Man: No.

Woman: *(She raises an eyebrow, hands him the rest of her cash.)* There. That's all I have.

Man: It's not all you have.

Woman: *(pause)* Very well. *(removing a ring from her finger)* This ring is worth more than most working men would make in a month.

Man: It's not enough.

Woman: *(flinging him her bracelet, brooch, necklace, divesting in a frantic strip-tease of wealth, but he remains impassive)* You people! Take, take, take! And it's "not enough!" It's never enough! What do you want?

Man: I told you. Charity means giving up something important.

Woman: *(backs up a step)* Oh, no!

Man: I want... your time.

Woman: *(long pause. He doesn't threaten her.)* My time?

Man: I'd just like you to spend a little time with me, that's all. See, it's easy to be charitable from a distance. And people give me things, and that's nice, but their hearts... They don't really see me. They don't seem to have the time.

Woman: *(starts walking away, shaking her head)* I spend so much time trying to help these people, and this is the thanks I get.

Man: Wait. Ma'am? Please? *(She stops.)* I suppose you give a lot of time to your charity organizations, and... well, thank you. Now how about giving some time to us? Not working for us, just—with us. I think we might learn some things from each other. This morning's a good start. You wanted to meet somebody and organize a new charity, anyway. Well, here we are!

Woman: *(looks at him intently)* Perhaps... perhaps we get so involved in the cause... *(slowly)*... that we don't see the individual.

Man: I've got a confession to make. I'm a little prejudiced and narrow-minded myself. See, I don't like rich folks. As a class, I figure they're all ignorant snobs. But, I may be wrong. In fact, I think I am wrong. For instance, you're not an ignorant snob, are you? *(pause)* *(She smiles at him strangely.)* Ah, listen, I've come into a bit of money lately. Do you have time for lunch? My treat.

Woman: *(She chortles, offers him her arm.)* You know, I've been thinking. With a close shave and a good suit, you could look quite... presentable.

Man: Good enough to pass as "high society"? *(She nods.)* Careful, now, you'll start seeing bums as though they may be gentlemen—and who knows where that may lead? *(They stroll off together.)*

The End.

Originally published in *Resources for Youth Ministry* 85:4.

Republished and revised in October 2011 for thESource.

thESource is published on the Web by LCMS District & Congregational Services—Youth Ministry. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 South Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 1-800-248-1930; www.youthESource.com. Editor: Sherrah Holobaugh Behrens. VOL. 8 NO. 10. October 2011.