**That Time I Tried Street Preaching –** by Thailer Jimerson

**November 10, 2012**

If you're local, you probably have the feeling it must've been cold this day. But it's Indy weather, and Indy weather is like a box of chocolates. Surprisingly, it was warm enough to walk around town with no jacket, just a hoodie.

 Ryan Pugh and I decided it was time to take our faith to another level in obedience to Jesus, so we thought we'd scour the streets of Indianapolis, looking for the homeless to help and pray with, then we'd finish the day off actually preaching at a busy street corner. We also wanted to give people the most essential thing in the world, so I spent the night before tearing the "Sinner's Prayer" page out of 150 New Testaments, ESV Christmas Edition. I'm still confused why this method of receiving Christ is propounded like gospel truth when we read nothing like it in the Bible. When people accepted Christ, they received him by faith and in baptism (Acts 2.38).

 The first part of the day we found quite a few people sitting on this or that street corner. We spoke with them; heard their stories. One guy was kicked out of his house. Others cursed at us. Another was the son of a pastor and was in and out of the shelter at Wheeler Mission. We offered to pray with them, and then we handed out blankets, food, water and other donations from some Christians in a local church. There's nothing like riding high off the fumes of white-hot zeal.

 There's also nothing like the knee-buckling nervous energy at the prospect of doing open-air preaching. Do you remember how you felt when you resolved to snag your first kiss? Or right before you finally asked your Secret Admiration whether or not their feelings were reciprocal? Or wondering what the elders wanted to talk to you about when they requested you for a meeting?

 It was like that. But worse.

 We were blessed to advance slowly because finding a busy enough street corner to preach on is harder than it sounds. Most intersections we chose would be busy for 45 seconds, and then there'd be no one for a few minutes. You looked like a fool mumbling into the wind. But we finally found the perfect place at the southeast corner of Maryland and Illinois. You know the one, right in front of the entrance to Circle Center Mall, underneath the Regal Cinemas sign.

 That day, we shared the corner with a promoter in a huge Hulk costume and downtown's most popular panhandler. There wasn't anything all that unique about him, except he was loud and he carried a charming sign. On it wasn't scrawled the typical message of God's blessings, or the family to support or anything like that.

 It had a frank, unabashed message: "Why lie? It's for beer." He was a hoot. Everyone wanted a picture with him.

 We sat our box of New Testaments down. I opened my Bible and started reading Acts 17 in my loudest projection. After I finished, I started using Paul's sermon before the Areopagus as the basis for my own. I preached, and I did so without making any direct eye contact, of course.

 Everything seemed to be going well for about three minutes. Some stopped to listen, others walked past trying to enter the mall, but after a few moments, a little crowd began to develop - composed mostly of a ladies traveling basketball team.

 Then something strange happened. In the middle of my sentence, I heard the vagrant (sorry, I wish I knew his name) start hollering at the top of his lungs.

 "Oh, heck no! Get off my block. This here is my block. Ain't nobody asked you to come here," he screamed, as he shook his pocket change filled pitcher at us, splashing pennies here and there. I didn't know what to do. I was already nervous. But now I was scared. Should I continue to preach? How could I between his screaming and the rattling of his pitcher?

 At that moment, a guy standing directly behind me facing the Steak 'n Shake, whispered over his shoulder "Don't listen to him. Keep preaching. Just keep preaching."

 So, I did. I stubbornly spoke my message past the shouts of the vagrant, and he eventually turned away and left us alone. After I was done, the crowd was asking us questions, and they were generally encouraged by our example. They must have been believers. The Hulk wanted a picture with us (or did we want a picture with him?). As Ryan finished passing out New Testaments to everyone in the crowd, I grabbed one, walked to the vagrant, knelt at his feet and softly placed a New Testament there.

I think about that story sometimes. Now, we could debate if open-air preaching is the most effective way to reach people today. And if you disagreed with it, I would probably agree with you. Most people are reached today through genuine relationships.

 But still. I was a bolder person then. I took evangelism seriously - seriously enough that I did something that was not in my character at all, something terrifying.

I miss the boldness of my younger days. Maybe you do, too.