



August 2021

Dear CWR/PTM Friend and Partner,

...Truly I tell you, *whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*
—Matthew 25:40, my emphasis

At five years of age, Joseph Merrick (1862-1890) started to display strange bodily disfigurements. His head slowly became more and more swollen and contorted, as did his right arm and hand. His skin became lumpy and felt like leather—its texture and color like that of an elephant causing him to be known, later in life, as “The Elephant Man.”

Merrick’s mother died when he was eleven, signaling an end for him of being loved for who he was in spite of what he looked like. After his father remarried, Merrick was spurned by his family. Because of constant taunting and rejection by his family, Merrick left home as a teenager and tried to find employment on the streets of his hometown of Leicester, England. *He found a grim and unforgiving world, in which few people were even willing to look at him.*

As failure followed failure, Merrick eventually concluded he might be able to earn his living by working in the circus world, becoming what was called at that time a “novelty exhibition.” So it was that Merrick, enduring unrelenting pain from this swollen body, became a human curiosity, his monster-like, hideously twisted body on display for the amusement of others.

His manager eventually arranged for Merrick to move to London where he became the featured “attraction” in what was called *The Elephant Man Exhibit* in a small shop just across the street from the London Hospital. Given its proximity to the hospital, medical students and doctors often visited the “exhibition” of Merrick’s grotesquely twisted and swollen body.

After visiting Merrick’s “exhibition,” Dr. Frederick Treves arranged to have him admitted to the hospital and given some relief from the pain he was enduring. *Initially paying for all of Joseph’s needs out of his own pocket, Dr. Treves treated “The Elephant Man” like a person, rather than a display in a circus sideshow, and visited him daily.*

Dr. Treves, whether intentionally or not, knowingly or not, as he helped Merrick— one of the “least of these”—was serving Jesus.

Merrick was lonely and depressed—he realized that most women he met were either frightened or disgusted with his appearance. He was in constant discomfort and pain as the weight of his head did not allow him to sleep lying down. The obnoxious smell coming from his flesh caused many people to keep their distance.

A talented and successful London actress named Madge Kendall heard about Merrick and started to raise funds to care for him. Some believe she never visited him personally, so while it may never have actually happened, one story about her commitment to Merrick endures.

According to the story, Madge Kendall came to see Merrick one day and brought him a book of Shakespeare’s plays. Like an ugly beast with a beautiful princess, Merrick was horribly self-conscious

in the presence of this beautiful lady. Madge encouraged him to read, and in doing so he came to the second act of “Romeo and Juliet.”

Merrick read the lines of Romeo: “See! How she leans her cheek upon her hand, that I might touch her cheek.” Then Madge responded with the lines of Juliet, memorized from her many years in the theatre.

When they finished reading and reciting the rest of that act of “Romeo and Juliet” Madge Kendall took Merrick’s distorted fingers in her hand, and leaned over and kissed his swollen, elephant-like skin of his cheek, saying, **“Why, Mr. Merrick, you’re not an Elephant Man at all... Oh no! You are Romeo.”**

During his four years at the London Hospital, Merrick’s facial deformities continued to grow and his head enlarged—he died at the age of 27 either of asphyxia or a broken neck caused by the weight of his head as he had laid down for rest.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.”—Philippians 2:3-4, my emphasis

Those in whom Jesus lives his risen life, given the very humility of Jesus, “value others above” themselves, as Paul says in Philippians 2:3. While she was famous and a celebrated actress Madge Kendall was willing to befriend Joseph Merrick and served Jesus while doing so.

Jesus treats us as worthy of his service even though we are not. He did not only look to his own interests, but rather to ours. He counts us as valuable and worthy of his attention and his time. Thus he instructs us to pay forward the love and grace we are given, yielding to him so that he might produce his own love in us, which we may then give to others.

“... Love your neighbor as yourself.”—Matthew 22:39

The humility of our Lord Jesus Christ is exemplified when we are willing to lower ourselves, removing ourselves from the lofty perch of our own vanity, in order to befriend and serve others. Serving *“the least of these brothers and sisters of mine”* (Matthew 25:40) is a product of the workmanship and handiwork of God within us (Ephesians 2:10)—we are his new creation, in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). **By his grace and enabled by the life lived in us by Jesus we are privileged to serve as he did.**

“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”—Luke 22:2

Dr. Richard Selzer was a surgeon (1928-2016) who once removed a facial tumor from the cheek of a young married woman. As a result of the surgery Dr. Selzer had to cut a nerve in her mouth, leaving her with a twisted and distorted postoperative mouth.

As she recovered from the surgery, she was beginning to process the depressing reality that she would always look this way... here is an excerpt from his book, *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery*:

Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight, isolated from me... Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously...?

The young woman speaks. “Will my mouth always be like this?” she asks.

"Yes," I say, "it will. It will because the nerve was cut."

She nods, and is silent. But the young man smiles.

"I like it," he says. "It is kind of cute."

All at once I know who he is. I understand, and I lower my gaze... Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I am so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate hers, to show that their kiss still works.

It's often been said that Christ-followers should always preach the gospel, and if necessary, **use words**. The actions of this young husband spoke deep and affirming realities of his love, leaving no doubt in his wife's mind that in spite of her forever damaged mouth and face, he loved her and always would.

It's a beautiful and powerful thing for Christ to live out the fulness of our Lord's risen life that we love *"the least of these,"* his brothers and sisters. It's a profound privilege for you and me, as undeserving of God's love, mercy and grace as we are, to be his emissaries, his ambassadors, his very own children and heirs of his kingdom so that we might be missionaries of his love and grace.

No matter who *they* are, what *they* have done—no matter *their* age, *their* color, *their* creed, *their* language or *their* culture—**THEY are ALL** our brothers and sisters. *They* may be difficult to love. *They* may be difficult to even look at. *They* may not be like us at all.

Regardless, they are **ALL** brothers and sisters of Jesus, and when we have the opportunity, it is our privilege to serve them in Jesus' name, even as Jesus himself serves us.

In his 1979 song, "You Gotta Serve Somebody," Bob Dylan proclaimed that we all serve someone—we all serve somebody. So true—in our lives we will serve somebody. **As Christ-followers, we are blessed to serve Someone, first and foremost, and others in his name.**

Thanks be to God, by his grace, we are empowered and enabled to serve the Great Somebody, the Great Someone, the Great I AM, who serves us and lives in us that we might serve others in his name.

May the Father's peace dwell in you by God the Holy Spirit and may you rest in him through God the Son. With my love always

A co-servant of our Lord, together with you, blessed with the high honor of serving others in his name,



Greg Albrecht

President, Plain Truth Ministries

CWR/PTM Prayer List—August 2021

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

Please pray for my brother, who has been having treatment for prostate cancer.—British Columbia, Canada

Please pray for my son and his family. He has tested positive for COVID-19. He and his family are under one roof and his son is four months old.—Arizona

Please pray for my sister who is having problems with her kidneys and may have to go on dialysis.—Ohio

Please pray for our son who's under a lot of stress with his finances. He also has heart problems.—West Virginia

Please pray for my wife and the severe intestinal problems she has been enduring.—New York

Please pray for me as I have been ill for the past ten days. This is the worst illness I have ever experienced—I've had a fever and I can't keep down food.—United Kingdom

Please pray for my son-in-law who has glaucoma in both eyes. He's going to have surgery but the doctors say he won't be able to get back all of his vision loss.—West Virginia

I request your prayers for the healing of my back pain and the success of the carpal tunnel surgery on my right hand. Thank you in advance for your prayers.—Minnesota

Please pray for my grandson, who is 30 years old and on drugs. He needs help but he refuses to get it.—Florida

Please continue to pray for my wife's cancer remission.—New York

Please pray for our family. We have been in a downward spiral and have no way out of it.—Nebraska

Please pray for all the grieving families suffering from this pandemic. Please also pray for the health and healing of my family.—Maine

Please pray for my wife who has diabetes and cancer. Also please pray for my son and daughter for their protection.—California

I'm suffering with acid reflux. Please pray for God's healing and relief.—Louisiana

Please pray for relief from stress; my blood pressure has been dangerously high.—Texas

Please pray for me as I'm elderly with early stages of dementia and I'm also experiencing joint pain.—Arizona

Please pray for me as I will have open heart surgery soon. Please pray that my recovery will go well.—New Hampshire

My wife will soon have bariatric surgery to help her lose weight. Please pray that everything will go well.—Washington

Thank you for your prayers—my poor vision has improved.—Florida

Please pray for me as I will probably need surgery on my foot. I'm diabetic and I've been suffering with neuropathy as well as several other health issues. Thank you in advance for your prayers.—North Dakota

Please pray for my full recovery from Covid-19. Thank you for all you do.—Wisconsin

Our Father in Heaven: We thank you for your grace, mercy and love. You love each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our suffering servant who heals us, in whose name we pray—Amen.