

Monday - March 22

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Hebrews 13:1-3 (NIV)

This past year I became part of a new group at PUMC called Hope Letter Writers. This team was formed to write letters of hope and to provide encouragement to both men and women who are incarcerated in the Ohio prison system. In January of last year I was excited to be assigned my inmate to whom I was to correspond, Shelby. Shelby was serving her time at the Ohio Reformatory for Women located in Marysville Ohio. I wrote my first letter with some nervousness, but explained my purpose for writing, described our Hope Writing group at PUMC and mentioned that the chaplain at ORW thought that she might appreciate receiving letters from those in the community that support her and others that are incarcerated. In the first letter, I also probably mentioned what the sermon topic of the week had been the previous Sunday and also included one of my favorite Bible verses and what it meant to me. I waited with excitement to receive a reply. No reply came to my first letter or my second letter or my third letter, much to my disappointment.

Each month our group met to encourage each other with our letter writings and to share responses that had been received from those inmates who had responded. For those of us who were not getting responses it was hard. Did the inmates not like receiving our letters or were our letters not interesting or engaging? The consensus of the group was even though some of us may not be receiving a response, that hopefully our letters would continue to encourage the recipient. I admit, I was discouraged and had even considered drafting a letter to let Shelby know that I was not going to continue writing to her since I had not received a response.

I kept writing all through the summer and fall with no responses from Shelby. Then the week of Thanksgiving, Deacon Sandy, who is one of the leaders of the Hope Writers group, let me know that Shelby had been released from prison and that she had sent an email to the PUMC office address! Shelby thanked me for my letters and even though she had not written back to me, she shared how much the letters had meant to her! She also shared that she was pregnant at the time of her incarceration and she had recently been reunited with her baby and 8 year old son.

This experience is a reminder to myself and others how important human contact is! Don't underestimate the phone call, the text, the letter or the card or the hug that you give someone. Keep sharing the hope and love of God, even when you don't get a response or don't think it

matters to the other person. Reach out to someone today that you think may need encouragement. Be the light today and every day.

Song to download today: "Less Like Me" by Zach Williams

Karen

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for loving us. Help us to focus less on ourselves and what we need. Help us to be on the lookout for others that may need encouragement and to be reminded that they are loved by You. Amen.