

**We Behold You and We Respond**  
Matthew 25: 31-46  
Mark D. Anderson, President and CEO  
National Benevolent Association  
First Christian Church in Jefferson City, MO  
October 2015



**National  
Benevolent  
Association**  
CALLED TOGETHER | CALLED TO CARE



It is a joy to be with you this morning! On behalf of the National Benevolent Association, I bring you greetings from the Board of Trustees and our Staff. I also bring you greetings from our General Minister and President, the Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins.

A word of thanks and gratitude to your pastors, Reverends Beau Underwood and Sarah Kingsbery. It is not every church pastor, who has been in the pulpit for less than a year, is willing to offer up this time for an unknown preacher....please forgive him. In all honesty, I thank you for this opportunity to remind you all a bit about our shared Disciples heritage in caring for the least of these, and more importantly the work Disciples are doing across the denomination today in caring for God's people.

I would also like to lift up one of your own – Bob Robuck. Prior to me joining NBA five years ago, Bob had served on the Board of Trustees of the National Benevolent Association. As you can appreciate, this was a coup for NBA....or in the church language....it was a blessing. When Bob's term ended as a Trustee, he continued on as a member of our Finance and Audit Committees, where he continues to provide expertise, direction, and blesses our ministry today. Thank you Bob!

And one last word of gratitude to all of you. Your support of Disciples Mission Fund, the Church's common mission fund, is so greatly appreciated. The work NBA does is not possible without your generosity.

Won't you please join me in prayer: "Gracious God, we are grateful today to worship you and please let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight. Amen."

### **When Did We See You?**

In our scripture this morning from Matthew, the all too familiar one, Jesus tells of the Son of Man coming as the King who will divide the people of all nations, those to his right and those to his left. Jesus says to those on the right, "You are blessed by my Father!....for I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me." And the all too familiar question is echoed back to him, "When did we see you?"

Not being clergy myself, I rely on my colleagues and friends who have extensive training in the ancient Greek translation of the Bible. And what I discovered is that there are many meanings behind the word "see" that is referenced in the holy scripture.

The meaning is much greater than just seeing with our eyes, but it is to perceive with any of our senses, to take notice, discern, discover. It means to turn our eyes, our mind, our full attention to something....to be observant. It means to ascertain what must be done about something....to inspect, examine, look at and behold. It also means to know, to get knowledge of, to understand, to perceive. So you see, the word “see” in the parable takes on a whole new meaning.

On this heritage Sunday, let us be reminded that our mission, as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. Since 1886, the National Benevolent Association has been your general ministry that has focused on health and social service ministries. The legacy and history of the NBA is filled with the healing care and faithful commitment to service by many “clouds of witnesses”. So many years ago, just a couple hours east of where we are this morning, it was women of a Disciples church who “saw” Jesus. They noticed the plight of the homeless children living and begging on the streets of the city. They paid attention with all their senses, they gathered information on why the children were homeless, then they prayed to God and discerned about what to do, and then they took action. These six women in the prayer circle...mighty women I might add...opened up the St. Louis Christian Home, the first Disciples’ orphanage in the country. These beginnings are part of my heritage...they are part of your heritage...they are part of the Church’s heritage.

The ministry of NBA has always, and continues today, to be done in the context of the Church. From its beginnings so many years ago, we served the least of these, responding to the community in need at that time with the resources and know-how at that time – building orphanages, retirement communities and supportive care for people with disabilities. This work, this part of our heritage was intentional, relevant and meaningful.

And today, the NBA continues to respond within the context of the Church and the reality we see in our local communities. Our world and Church looks different from 128 years ago. Heck, it even looks different than 10 years ago. I imagine you could share with me stories of how First Christian Church has changed over the years, but I have no doubt that your commitment to calling people to Christ, nurturing others’ faiths, and reaching out to a hurting world has not faltered. It may look different, but at your core it remains the same. All of the work today is being done with intention, relevance and meaning.

### **Called to Care**

Today NBA does not own and operate ministries of care, but we see our calling as one to connect, resource, and lift up the vast array of Disciples health and social service ministries. It is local ministries who see, understand, discern and are responding to the needs in their local communities.

The NBA connects health and social service ministries empowering them to learn, collaborate, and grow stronger together. Two ministries just down the road, Woodhaven and Columbia Area Older Adult Ministry, are part of the Disciples Care Exchange – a joint venture with Disciples Home Missions and NBA that recently formed. The Exchange serves as a catalyst for advocacy, education and the support of innovative approaches to addressing justice issues. We are also connecting a variety of ministries through our Affinity Group Projects – Prison and Jail Ministries, and Mental Health and Wellness in Congregations. Each one is engaging local Disciples, in their local communities to hear God’s call and respond with compassion.



Rev. Dean Bucalos, the coordinator for the NBA's Prison and Jail Affinity Group ministries, tells of one trained Disciples volunteer leader, LaVece, at Crestwood Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky. LaVece has been so moved to make a difference that she has helped to support four returning citizens who were formerly incarcerated re-enter their community. LaVece has driven folks to job interviews, answered numerous late night calls, maintained regular contact, and simply has been a friend to those who seek to build a life of peace and wholeness. LaVece "sees" Jesus on a daily basis.

Through the NBA Incubate Initiative, we support social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways. NBA accompanies these new Disciples-led entrepreneurial health and social service ministries to assist them to strategically strengthen their ministry. One such Incubate partner, Trees of Righteousness Christian Church, founded Gomer's House in Portland, Oregon.



Early in life, Jacob struggled with an inadequately treated mental illness. In his attempts to cope, he developed an alcohol addiction and was estranged from his family by the time he was a young adult. Last year, Jacob was welcomed into the caring community of Gomer's House, led by Disciples Pastors Milele and James Hobbs. Jacob received safe housing, counseling, love, and trained to become one of the house managers at Gomer's House, the very place that saved his life. Pastors Milele and James Hobbs "see" Jesus on a daily basis.

In 2014, NBA launched a bold and exciting new program – XPLOR. Rebecca Wells came to us from Dallas, Texas! She knew she wanted a life-changing experience. This past year, she worked thirty hours each week with families experiencing homelessness, with the San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission. Rebecca learned to ask every day, "Am I being helpful to the people I serve, or am I just making myself feel good?" Rebecca met Anna at the Mission's Dignity Store, and helped empower this single mom to select some gifts for her son. This simple experience made an impact on Rebecca, and on Anna and her child. Rebecca learned to "see" Jesus on a daily basis.



Through NBA XPLOR, we partner young adults with Disciples congregations and the communities which they serve – impacting neighborhoods, the congregations, and the young adults. This program is geared toward young adults – ages 21 to 30 who are willing to spend 10 months living in simple community with one another. During these 10 months, the Residents spend 30 hours a week working in a local nonprofit, and through local congregations and a spiritual companion they discern the path God is calling them to. Our collective prayer is that the Residents will sense the gravitational pull of their faith, develop hearts for care and discern how to focus their life's work.

Last year we had 10 residents, at three locations, complete the program. One has gone onto seminary, one has begun his undergraduate work at Eureka College (at age 30), and two have returned to college to become a social worker and nurse.

This year...our second year...24 young adults entered the program, located in seven different sites, engaging several congregations and local nonprofits. Yes, you heard correctly...we more than doubled this program in one year – YIKES! Watch out Christian Church...they are coming to change the world!

And on one final note, I would be remised if I did not lift up the various ministries you are involved in, right here, at First Christian Church, in Jefferson City. You are partnering with a local elementary school. You have seen, discerned, and responded to children who need your assistance, not in a simple pat on the head, but in true partnership with the school, the kids and their parents. Buddy packs that you provide to children in your community can mean the difference between going hungry over a weekend or something that will sustain them until they return to school on Monday morning. A food pantry...every Tuesday?! Jesus knows you saw his children hungry and fed him. He knows you saw them thirsty and gave them something to drink.

First Christian Church – When else did you see our Lord and respond with compassion and care? Or maybe it is better if I ask, “When did you behold Jesus and give him your full attention, take notice of his plight, gathered information about why he may be in this circumstance so that you may understand better, then discern how you may be of assistance to him, and then finally how may you act that is in his best interest, not in a pejorative way, but one of being a true companion on this journey to wholeness together?” This may be the real question. Amen.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- In the sermon, we hear about the significance of when we behold, take notice, or discover God in our lives. When can you recall “seeing” Jesus? What was your response?
- When do we miss taking notice or discovering God? What prevents us from the opportunity of “seeing” Jesus?
- As Disciples of Christ, what does it mean to you (or your Disciples’ community) to respond with compassion and care when there is need?
- What ways can you imagine yourself or your Disciples’ community being more present with the health and social service needs in your midst?