



"And when they could not bring [the paralyzed man] to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him..." —Mark 2:3-4 (paraphrased)

REFLECTION

Ready and Able

"They need some help!" Tony Walters reported to his parents, referring to the deacons of the Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren in Scottsdale, Arizona. He continued, "I'm going to help them with Love Feast tonight!" So Tony arrived early and helped set the tables, moved the foot washing basins into place, put the food on the tables, and then stayed to help with clean-up. Tony has a deep appreciation for Love Feast, and is attuned to every detail. Recently he has been concerned that some of our elderly deacons may no longer be able to do the physical work of preparing the Love Feast. He saw that they needed help and he gave it.

You might not think this sounds too unusual unless you know Tony's story. Though he cannot count money, he collects the offering. Though he can't read much of the bulletin, he passes them out. Though he doesn't like to be touched or hugged, he offers caring and love. Born prematurely as the oldest in his biological family, Tony has experienced breathing problems, difficulty speaking, and hyperactivity. He has been diagnosed with autism, a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction. Now an adult, Tony continues to live at home with his parents.



Through all of Tony's problems, his community of faith has walked patiently with him. They love him and he gives back God's love in a variety of ways. God gave Tony the gifts of discernment and encouragement. He senses when others need a lift – a kind word or a listening ear. Even though he doesn't look people in the eye, he knows who is at church, who is missing, and any who are upset or hurting that day. Some in the congregation have

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become his friends and mentors, and have helped Tony develop a deep faith and sense of spirituality.

As a child he told his parents there was nothing to worry about when he was near Grandma's pool; he would just go to heaven if he drowned. This lack of fear changed a bit a few years later when Tony decided to be baptized. He was extremely afraid of putting his head under water, yet he was determined to follow Jesus' example. It was a difficult decision, but he braved it.

Children love him. One child even thought the four Gospels were Matthew, Mark, John, and Tony. A troubled adolescent's grandmother commented to Tony's parents how much she appreciated the listening ear and encouragement Tony offered to her grandson. When this was shared with Tony his only response was, "Well, somebody's got to do it!"

Tony lives in a world where he is sometimes ridiculed. He knows the life of the underdog and knows he has limited options in life. He works at McDonald's cleaning the dining area. He befriends homeless people who scavenge the trash outside his restaurant. He knows them by name and frequently asks his parents to pray for a homeless friend who is "very sad" due to the death of a loved one. Tony invites his co-workers and homeless friends to his church. He carries business cards with information about his church since he can't verbally communicate it well.

After the last Love Feast, the deacons, knowing Tony's spiritual gifts and realizing his desire to help them, voted unanimously to present him as a prospective deacon at the next congregational meeting, if he consented. Tony accepted the call and the congregation affirmed him as a deacon. Tony feels very honored to be chosen by his church to be a deacon. On the first Sunday of 2010 Tony was overjoyed to be one of the deacons serving at a bread and cup communion during worship. He needed no instruction; Tony knew exactly how it was done.

As Jim Pierson says in his book of the same title, there are *No Disabled Souls*.

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