



Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. Matt. 18:5

One Great Hour of Sharing

Maybe Bel Lam's father died in battle; maybe he was taken prisoner; maybe he returned to the United States. Bel will probably never know. When the U.S. forces left Vietnam, Bel's mother buried her only picture of his father for fear it might be used as evidence in a "war crimes" trial that could result in a sentence of hard labor for fraternizing with the enemy.

Taunted and threatened at school because of his wide eyes and curly light hair, Bel dropped out and began selling cigarettes on street corners. Surely, he thought, his father would come back to claim him. He never did.

Eventually, relations between the United States and Vietnam began to thaw. Conversations regarding Amerasian children led to an agreement to allow Bel and about 20,000 others to leave Vietnam and come to the land of their fathers.

For many of these children, their arrival in the United States was less than the joyful homecoming of their dreams. Some suffered discrimination similar to that they experienced in Vietnam. In the words of one, "In Vietnam I could cluck like the

chickens all around me, but looked like a duck. Here I look like the ducks, but cluck like a chicken. I don't fit in anywhere."

Bel was lucky. Presbyterians in Phoenix, Arizona, were waiting for him and his mother. In partnership with Presbyterian World Service, members of Memorial Presbyterian Church provided encouragement and help for their housing, food, and transportation. His mother went to work cleaning rooms in one of the many resorts. Bel completed a course of study in English and food preparation at the Maricopa County Skills Center and became an assistant to the chef at the prestigious Phoenix Mansion Club. Speaking English fluently and getting around town on his own, Bel is healthy, happy, and gainfully employed.

A sponsoring congregation motivated by God's all-embracing love can help Amerasians in their struggle to breathe the fresh air of opportunity. And through the One Great Hour of Sharing, all Presbyterians can collectively put their arms around strangers and welcome them as members of the family of God. Let us offer our gifts today in praise and thanks for God's unlimited love, and for this opportunity to witness to it.

People with a lot of what we call riches — money and possessions — and people with little have different kinds of problems. The problems of having too little we know something about, although few of us have really experienced them: hunger, poor health, lack of a voice in one's own future. Yet most of us don't want to think about the problems of having too much — exactly because those are our problems.

The first problem is we deceive ourselves about how much we actually have, because we compare ourselves with people who have more. We may not know many people who are a lot poorer than we are. Yet throughout the world there are millions of people who have much less than we think is possible to survive on. Another problem is that we are slaves to our possessions — we spend much of our money and our time taking care of them. All we really get in return is a desire for more to fill the emptiness inside.

But the biggest problem with having too many things is that they help us

to forget what we really need. Having things makes it easy to believe that we are in control of our lives — that we don't need anyone's help.

Without a lot of material wealth, people often have a clearer perception of their own needs — they know they need help. Those who believe in God know that God is the ultimate source of help. One of the miraculous ways God helps both the rich and the poor is by helping us remember that we are all one family.

Families share. We share things, we share feelings, we share our lives. Perhaps as we who have many material riches share them with other members of God's family who have less, we can also share some of their riches — a keen sense of the need for God's vital presence in our lives, a presence which fills the emptiness. Once we allow ourselves to remember that need, we may be sure it will be filled with God's presence. May God bless the gifts we give today, and those we receive, in Jesus' name.