

THE SHOES

My alarm went off—it was Sunday again; I was tired—but it was my one day to sleep in. But the guilt I'd have felt the rest of the day would have been too much, so I'd go; I'd pray.

I showered and shaved, adjusted suit and tie got there and swung into a pew just in time. Bowing my head in humble prayer, before I closed my eyes, I saw that the shoe of the man next to me was touching my own and I sighed.

With plenty of room on either side, I thought, “Why do our soles have to touch?” It bothered me so; he was glued to my shoes; but it didn't seem to bother him much.

Then the prayer began: “Heavenly Father” someone said—But I thought, “Does this man with the shoes have no pride?” They were duty, worn, scratched end to end. What's worse, there were holes on the side!

“Thank you for blessings,” the prayer went on. The shoe man said a quiet “amen.” I tried to focus on the prayer, but my thoughts were on his shoes again. Aren't we to look our best when walking through that door? “Well, this certainly isn't it I thought” glancing toward the floor.

Then the prayer ended and songs of praise began. The shoe man was loud, sounding proud as he sang. He lifted the rafters; his hands raised high. The Lord surely heard his voice from the sky.

Then the offering was passed; what I threw in was steep. The shoe man reached into his pockets so deep, and I tried to see what he pulled out to put in. Then I heard a soft “click”, as when silver hits tin. The sermon bored me to tears—and no lie—it was the same for the shoe man, for tears fell from his eyes.

At the end of the sermon, as was the custom here, we must greet the visitors and show them good cheer. But I was moved inside to want to meet this man, so after the closing I shook his hand. He was old, his skin dark, his hair a mess. I thanked his for coming, for being our guest.

He said, “My name's Charlie, glad to meet you, my friend.” There were tears in his eyes, but he had a wide grin. “Let me explain,” he said, wiping his tears. I've been coming for month, and you're the first to say “Hi.”

“I know I don't look like all the rest, but I always try to look my best. I polish my shoes before my long walk, but by the time I get here they're as dusty as chalk”

My heart fell to my knees, but I held back my tears. He continued, “And I must apologize for sitting so near.” But I know when I get here, I must look a sight.” And I thought...if I touched you, our souls might unite.”

I was silent for a moment, knowing anything I said would pale in comparison, so I spoke from my heart not my head. “Oh, you touched me”, I said. And taught me, in part, that the best of man is what's in his heart.

The rest I thought, this man will never know...How thankful I am that he touched my soul!

Author unknown