



A mosaic of Friendly living

## Coffee is an Act of Love

By Megan Anderson  
and Daniel J. Kasztelan



### I. Coffee with Jesus

By Megan L. Anderson

**A**s a barista, mornings now bid me rise at 4 a.m. to fill enough carafes with liquid motivation for the 6 a.m. rush. Before the sun peeks over earth I've heard, "Thanks, hon," from the construction foreman with a gravelly, Sam Elliott-like voice; said, "Have a great day," to half the hospital's nurses as they caffeinate before their rounds; and poured refills for the jogging club whose daily circuit ends at the espresso machine. And of course I've put aside the best cinnamon roll for the night janitor just getting off work who, despite his bone-tiredness, always greets me with a big toothless grin and wants to know how I'm doing.

People of all kinds—some kinder than others—pass through the coffee shop doors. There's also the wealthy calorie-counting customer whose specialty drink requires a near-reprogramming of the cash register, who changes her order because she doesn't like the price after I've already swiped her credit card. Naturally she doesn't tip. And the person who threw 16 ounces of boiling water at my coworker because it wasn't 20 ounces. Water is free, by the way. So are refills.

When I see certain regulars pull into the parking lot, I know the day is about to get more interesting in a less-than-pleasant

way. Others bring a sigh of relief or a much-needed laugh. We see the best and worst of humanity from behind the bar. And it makes me wonder what Jesus would look like were he to stop in.

Would he quietly wait in line, order a simple house blend, then strike up a conversation with the person sitting alone? Would he pay for the people behind him and start a chain of generosity? Would he call out the rude on their unseemly behavior? Would he stay near the bar and talk to me, maybe come back and help during a rush? I don't know what Jesus would do as a customer, but I'm learning to treat each person who comes through like they're Jesus in disguise. Who knows? They might be.

It's easy to love the lovable, but God calls our love to reach farther than that. The unlovely, the extra-grace-required folks? They're a bit trickier. But as one of my nurse regulars pointed out, when people raise Cain, they're usually scared. Scared they aren't enough. Scared that they're failing somehow. Scared of what the day may bring.

So while not all our customers act like Jesus, I can at least try to give them a glimpse of his love. It could be that the ninety seconds I have with that person are the only ninety seconds in which somebody extends to them the kind of love that casts out fear. I don't want to waste that minute-and-a-half.

## II. Coffee is an act of love

By Daniel J. Kasztelan

Nearly a decade ago, I brought Bart Campolo to the Quaker college where I worked to speak about the small Christian community he'd founded in the Walnut Hills neighborhood of Cincinnati: an attempt by a handful of families to live in community with the poor—not to evangelize, but simply to love.



The essays he wrote about this experiment in learning to love without fixing or judgement were deeply meaningful to me, and taught me a great deal about Christian hope (this was obviously a number of years before Bart's appointment as secular humanist chaplain at the University of Southern California).

Hearing him speak in person was a little more challenging than reading his essays. I heard him speak several different times in different places, so I'm not entirely sure I got exactly right how all his ideas fit together, but I think I got pretty close. In one venue, a student asked him whether he and his companions had a church. He said they didn't, that all three families had come from evangelical churches where they'd been burned or where they'd burned out, and while they did worship together, they didn't feel the need for a church to do that. And then he said, "I have a hard time believing anymore that what goes on in church is relevant to our world. When I see that people are getting together in the church basement after services to plan out who's going to move in with whom after people start to lose their jobs and their houses, when I see that churches are beginning to plan out how they will be eating together, then the church will seem relevant to me. But right now I don't need it."

Mind you, I'm a guy who's spent nearly twenty years working on behalf of the Friends Church/Religious Society of Friends, so it wasn't (and isn't) a pronouncement that sits easily with me. But

it was consistent with the other things he was saying. He talked about Jesus practicing his religion as a poor person speaking to other poor people, and how so much of what Jesus said—all of what he said, actually—was aimed at teaching poor people how to thrive in their lives while living under Powers to whom their lives were meaningless and disposable. He talked about how inseparable

*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*  
[Matt. 22:37-40]

the activities of loving God and loving people are, about how Jesus even says that these two activities are equivalent: you cannot love God without loving people, and whatever you do to love people is still about loving God. He said that the gospels were meant to help us understand how to care for one another, what care meant, who we were supposed to care for. He said he no longer spoke of his own ministry work as a mission, or a program. He would speak about it as learning how to love his neighbors, and trying to be some yeast in their own learning how to love.

I don't disagree with what he said about love. The difficult part for me is figuring out how to do those things. I'm pretty keenly aware of all the ways in which I'm not loving—and don't want to be loving. And one of the reasons is because it just seems so burdensome. The availability required, the willingness to be distracted, the close proximity to those who don't think like me or dress like me or vote like me or be church like me. It's maybe a little bit like agreeing to be dressed down by sandpaper on a daily basis.

But then sometimes I catch a whiff of coffee and I'm reminded it doesn't have to be that difficult.

I loved the smell of coffee long before I ever drank coffee. I loved it as a small child, five or six years old, waking up on a cold winter morning in my upstairs bedroom, the smell of the coffee drifting up the stairs. Sometimes the smell of bacon came along with it. Sometimes along with the coffee I heard the door

on the wood stove scraping open, and the thunk of wood, and I knew that at least by the time my parents came to carry me out of bed, the fire would be going and I could stand warming by the stove as I woke up. I think back on it, and I see how they carried me and cooked for me and clothed me, all accompanied by the smell of coffee.

But I don't have to go back that far. One of my fondest memories of my time as a pastor was about twenty minutes after the social time began, after our worship service was over. Sunday is your big performance day when you're a pastor, and there were all kinds of reasons why Sundays raised my blood pressure. I was usually up until two or three in the morning working on my sermon, which still wasn't finished when I woke up at six. So I was racing against the clock until eleven when Meeting started, then after Meeting, I was in one of our hallways, or pinned behind my office desk, as a line of people wanted to argue with the sermon or praise it, ask me about committee work, make sure I knew what was going on with a relative or with themselves—all very legitimate concerns, and I didn't begrudge them the time, but dang it, I'd been running for half a day already on half-sleep, and I needed *caffeine*. But I couldn't get into the kitchen.

Therefore, I loved the woman who began to seek me out, in whatever hallway or room I happened to be sequestered, and ask whether I wanted coffee, and what I took in it, and then when she learned what I took in my coffee, and that, yes, I always did want coffee, she simply came to me and put a cup of coffee in my hand, and I loved her even more. It wasn't really so much about the coffee. It was about the fact that in this particular moment, when I was being asked to give attention and care to everyone around me, she was paying attention and giving care to me. I knew that. I believe she knew that. Occasionally someone would say something like, "Oh, I think he can get his own coffee," or, "Gee, Dan, we need to figure out some way that you can come have hospitality with the rest of us," but she never quit bringing the coffee, and I never quit accepting it—which was about a lot

more than caffeine. (Although, in fact, I also was never able to figure out a way to join with the others for hospitality.)

I loved that woman for bringing me coffee because that cup in my hand was about more than caffeine. It was an act of love. All through my life, from my parents to my pastoring, coffee has been an act of love. And when I consider or remember that coffee is an act of love, it gives me hope that somewhere in me I have some small ability to learn to care for my neighbors as Jesus—and Bart Campolo—advise me to do. Because maybe care doesn't have to be massive and passionate. Maybe it can be small and subtle. Like a cup of coffee.

Prompted by Bart Campolo, I began to think of coffee as an act of love during that time of working at a small college. And when I did, I began to see love all around me. Not just in coffee. In all the work: preparing lectures and grading papers, filling out forms, caring to talk in hallways, to serve on committees, to turn light switches on and off, to fix plumbing, to install software—all these small things done not for one individual's benefit, but for the benefit of others, for the benefit of that small community two blocks long and one block wide. It looked an awful lot like the kind of church Bart Campolo thought might be relevant—a church that lifts us up as we move through the world.

### III. Begetting thankfulness

By Megan L. Anderson

**H**is frame slowly eclipsed the serving window, casting a shadow over the coffee counter. Most visitors flit past on their way to doctors' appointments. Nurses roll in hot like NASCAR drivers in the pit, speeding away just as quickly once they've fueled up. We hospital baristas keep a furious pace



most days, but once in a while we're blessed with a few quiet minutes to restock supplies and catch our breaths. In one such pause he loomed large and demanding at my station. "Here we go," I thought.

He met my "hello" with a scowling countenance and awkward silence. Making use of those precious between-rush seconds while he scrutinized the menu, I wiped down the counter and scrubbed the espresso machine, praying that God would show me how to serve this tough customer with compassion and grace instead of impatience. After a long shift of being condescended to and barked at, pandering to this lingering mountain of misery was enough to push me over the edge.

After complaining about the prices of drinks he had no intention of trying, and grilling me over why we would even sell such things as scones and mochas, he finally ordered a fountain soda and launched into a treatise about why his family is the worst. Why should he have to come from out-of-town to look after his mother when his brother lives a mere tenth-of-a-mile away from the hospital? What good is having a nurse sister-in-law if she's too busy to nurse her own family? After a few more choice expletives on the subject, his eyes fell on the notebook we set out for customers to share what they're thankful for as we make their drinks.

"Humph. I lost my leg. I'm not thankful for *anything!*" he boomed.

As I scooped ice for his beverage, he launched into a new tragic litany. He'd been injured in the military and suffered from complications of diabetes. For months he'd lived in agony, with sores the size of fifty-cent pieces covering his legs. When the government failed to provide the treatment he'd been promised, he lost his leg to disease. It took another several years before they finally arranged for a prosthetic. And, of course, it doesn't fit properly. Through it all he'd lived alone on a shoestring budget. So why should he be the one paying for the gas to come sit in a hospital all day with someone else?

"This one's on the house today," I said, placing the styrofoam cup in front of him. He froze.

"Why?" He was incredulous.

"It sounds like you could use a little something to make your day nicer."

He took a sip. He sighed. His posture softened.

"That tastes good." He said. "I thank you."

It's easy to judge people who wear their misfortunes like armor, but as I counted my money for his drink into the register after he'd gone, I contemplated our similarities. Perhaps I've not suffered physically as he has or faced comparable challenges, but I have struggled to accept love. I continue to struggle to be thankful despite the many blessings that surround me every day. I know my own negative attitude has cast a shadow over others more than a time or two. But I've also learned that thankfulness begets thankfulness, and sometimes it takes only something small to convey gratitude to another heart. Hopefully something like giving a man a drink.



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## The sin of anxiety

By Hannah Mullikan Lutz

REASON