

Washing a Dirty Girl

Years ago, at the annual conference of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone, West Africa, the meetings were held in a large sanctuary in the capital city, Freetown.

Sharon Rhodes-Wickett, in her book *Collapsing the Distance between Heaven and Earth*, shared a riveting story about what happened.

Each day, as attendees entered the large doors into the sanctuary, there was a young girl – maybe about the age of 8 – who begged at the door. She looked ragged, dirty. Her hair was matted and knotty, and she had on tattered clothes.

“No one seemed to know her, and people brushed her aside upon entering,” Rhodes-Wickett said. “Some of the pastors tried to tell her to go away. They were busy doing the work of the church. She was a bother. This went on for several days.”

One day, during a session of the conference, “my peripheral vision caught some motion outside. I looked out the window, and there on the patio, outside the sanctuary, was a woman, a lay member of the conference, who found a bucket and some soap. Although dressed in a beautiful traditional tie-dye gown, she pushed up her sleeves, and she was giving that 8-year-old girl a bath. She soaped up her hair and was tenderly making her all clean and new. She washed the clothes the child had been wearing, and they were spread out on the bushes in the sun drying. The woman went out and got another dress for her to wear, too.”



Hundreds of pastors and devoted laypersons poured into the Methodist Church of Freetown to do the work of the church, Rhodes-Wickett said. “But outside, on the edges, quietly and without notice, the work of redemption – the work of Jesus Christ – was being done. It was not the work of the committees and reports and programs. It was the work of soap and water and human touch and being able to see the face of Jesus in that of an abandoned 8-year-old girl.”

What’s the lesson for us in Life Care and Century Park? What we do for others – the hard work of assisting people with their baths and helping with their toileting, attending to a variety of personal needs – is making people clean and new.

It is labor that earns the approval of Jesus. He said: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (John 13:34-35 ESV).