

Disturbing poverty can cause disturbance



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

At the conclusion of his essay, "A Testament of Hope," published after his death, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote that Jesus "changed the course of [human-kind] with only the poor and despised." The Man of Nazareth did not own property or have friends in high places. He never wrote anything so he had no published books. Yet he and his small band of rough-looking rogues serve as a mod-

el for those today "who fight for human justice, brotherhood [and sisterhood], secure peace and abundance for all." King's new testament (pause for thought) proclaimed that "the poor and despised... will revolutionize this era." It sounds like he was flipping the whole concept of leadership upside down.

Not long ago I attended a service in a historic downtown sanctuary. An elderly lady seemed startled when I came in the front door. Apparently most congregants enter through other doors. She handed me the morning's order of service and I took my place near the back. The image on the cover of the bulletin caught my attention. It was a hooded

person lying in a darkened doorway.

Poverty can be very disturbing to see – even worse to experience. "Disturb" comes from an old word for "tumult" or feeling disordered and confused. We're shaken up and hardly know what to do. If we are poor ourselves, without much in the way of basic necessities, our lives can be tumultuous. Many who are poorer (this is all relative to location and situation) try to keep their lives orderly, even if that means keeping up the appearance of being "normal" and fitting in, blending in with everyone else. They may keep the backpack they carry neatly packed, their campsite clean or their car hidden. Those who can't or don't try

to keep their life ordered, are often the ones the community notices and reacts to. Their tumult becomes our disturbance.

During the service the pastor described the image of the person lying in the doorway. She said the painter told her she passed this person on her way to church and was so moved that she took a photo and later painted the picture. The shadowy figure disappeared, but the image stayed with her and it changed her life.

I left that morning with discomfiting disturbance in mind. I wondered:

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