

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

I write under obedience. My minister told me I must and it is so very, very hard. I have not picked up a pen in months. It has been a dry time, a fill-up time, a closed door time. I have been enjoying my negative "no" to the Lord. Father God, forgive. He does. He always does. He has been cuddling, caressing, cradling, caring, as only a loving Daddy can, and ah, the patience of Job our Lord God does have! So I am getting down from His lap on this gloriously beautiful day and am now sitting on a concrete bench strategically placed by a stream and an old oak tree. I am at my mama's in Birmingham and ah, the balance of this place. The breeze is gentle. The birds are singing. Even the little rocks and moss and twigs at my feet are showing forth their shine on this spring-promising day. Nature is in harmony and so are the surrounding houses. I just walked the loop that makes up this enclosed place, and every single one of these houses is perfect. They are individual little jewels. It was an aesthetically pleasing experience to see such order, such maintenance, such perfection. This environment, as I said, is pleasing. I thought -- heaven will have such an "all is right" feeling, but even more so.

Except, where are the people? Doors shut. Curtains drawn. It is early, but not that early. With over forty houses, I

ran into two people -- a housekeeper sweeping a driveway and the father of a high school friend of mine taking out the garbage. Then I wondered, in this idyllic spot, if everyone came out of their homes and spent some time together -- hours, weeks, months, years -- would there be such harmony?

I have to stop and giggle. I can hear a soprano vocalizing in her home up on the ridge. On the lower level, where I sit, a dog is simultaneously howling his best, trying to keep up. Actually, he's doing quite a good job. As a fellow soprano, scales are a bore, and this dissonant duet makes it evermore interesting. "The hills are alive with the sound of music."

Anyway, where was I, Pilgrim? Oh, yes, disharmony -- is there such a word? I think that is what we would have if all the neighbors came out and commingled for any length of time, for this place is a haven, not Heaven. Eventually all would probably show their real colors. Their differences, their diversity, would eventually divide. Our differences, our diversity, would eventually divide. Walls will be built. Fortresses will be made. Drawbridges will be pulled up. Turfs claimed. Lines drawn. Divide and conquer one and all! Humanly speaking, that seems to be our typically broken nature, but Christianly speaking, "it ain't necessarily so."

I hope I am not lecturing, preaching, procrastinating. I am supposed to be writing about Justus Grant. It is so hard. How does one capture a holy moment in words? How dare we

try? There is no way I can. All I can do is to be a reporter, a recorder. In preparation, I am taking off my shoes and "bending the knee of my heart." It is with trembling trepidation that I will try to tell you of a holy ground experience where all was in harmony, including the people.

Two weeks ago I went to the funeral of Justus Grant. I didn't know him, but I knew his primary care giver -- my first cousin, Dorothy. I went out of respect, concern, and love for her. She had been his appointed foster parent for the last few months of his life.

The last time I had seen Dorothy, it was an unusually special time because also present were five children -- three sisters and a brother and a sister. They were spending the weekend. Santa Claus himself could not have provided a more special retreat. Each child had his or her own cubbyhole full of clothes and toys which Dorothy had provided for the visit.

There was giggling and laughing. A joyful, contagious playfulness seemed to be bouncing off those walls. It was truly a safe place, a safe haven. The children needed it, as we all do, but even more so because their normal day-to-day world was a scary one. AIDS lived with them, either directly or indirectly, either personally or parentally. "Ugh! Oh God!" Those might have been my initial thoughts and feelings, but they were not the ones that remained. The place was a haven, a holy ground. There was love which flourished, flowed, knocked down barriers, broke walls, and let our Lord's Light

come in. It was my closest Christ-filled moment of Christmas.

And then, it was Justus' funeral. It was the most eternally expanding experience I've ever encountered.

You know the verse in Isaiah about "the Lamb shall lie down with the Lion," and "a little child shall lead." We know, know that it is about our Lord and our heavenly home. Well, I've had a glimpse of it, a tiny glimmer. I've experienced a sliver of that Ultimate Reality, and I do not want to forget it.

Justus Grant died at 18 months. He was born with AIDS, and he died from AIDS. We as Christians have to share some of that burden.

The tiny coffin was covered in pale, baby blue material with a blanket of blue and white carnations. About fifty of us gathered -- men -- women, black -- white -- oriental, young -- old, fat -- skinny, rich -- poor, drug addicts -- non-drug addicts, gay -- straight, HIV negative -- HIV positive. Care-givers. Lovers. People. Varied. Mixed up. Gloriously diverse people -- gathered.

Everybody was there that had left their bag of judgmental throwing rocks at home along with their walls, their divisions, their dislikes, their prejudices and their hates. They left them behind.

It was a big picture, a long view-type environment where, as I said, there was a glimmer, a glimpse, a tiny flicker of an awareness of the Peaceable Kingdom.

We as Christians are called to start building that land

now by tearing down barriers. Justus Grant, in his short life, did a mighty work towards this goal. "And a little child shall lead." No, Justus wasn't the Child, but as a child he was something! I'll bet he got a drum roll when he walked to the other side. I'll bet he got a standing ovation. I'll bet he got a "well done, good and faithful servant." He did his Kingdom-building part. Dorothy did, and so did many other caregivers.

May we as Christians do our part to continue this Kingdom-building. And as I was shown and am shown daily, it is not about bricks and mortar but rather Love, Christ-like Love.

Peace, my brothers and sisters, Peaceable Kingdom-type peace.

*Love and I am your sister in Christ,
Lucy*

P.S. On the funeral program there was a picture of this adorable, bright-eyed child and underneath the statement said, "He touched so many hearts." You can add me to that list. Thank you, Justus. And now, come on group. Come on, Precious Pilgrims. Let's start a kingdom building.