

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie  
Arlington Street Church  
17 December, 2017

Lessons and Carols:  
**Let Every Heart Prepare!**

The photo was posted three years ago. The woman is wearing a pink and white blouse. The man is clean-shaven, smiling. And here are their dogs – it’s a family photo. They look happy.

His name is Johnny Bobbitt. The last time his Facebook page was updated was a year and a half ago.... And then, something went terribly wrong.

Now there’s another photo of Johnny; it ran in newspapers across the country last month. He is unrecognizable. A huge, bushy beard sticks out from under the hood of his slicker. He is gaunt, his eyes are downcast, he’s not smiling. He lives with two other guys in Philly ... maybe under an overpass, maybe in an alley. Johnny Bobbitt is homeless and destitute.

Miraculously, that’s not the whole story.

Driving on Interstate 95 with the gas light on, Kate McClure was hoping she could make it to a filling station when she ran out of luck. She pulled onto a dark exit ramp, pulled over as far as she could. It was not a great neighborhood. Heart pounding, she got out of the car to head off in search of fuel.

Johnny Bobbitt sits on the side of the road there every day, holding a sign. What was he doing there, still up at 11:00 at night? He told Kate to get back into the car and lock the doors. Minutes later, he returned with a red can. He’d used his last twenty dollars to buy gas, so Kate could get home safely.

She didn’t have any cash on her, but he didn’t ask to be repaid.

That’s not the whole story, either.

Over the next few weeks, Kate went back to Johnny's spot and repaid him for the gas. She gave him a jacket, gloves, a hat, and warm socks. Every time she sees him, she gives him a few dollars. Every time she talks with him, she wants to help him more.

One day, she brought him a box of cereal bars. The first thing he said was, "Do you want one?" Another time she brought him two convenience store gift cards and a case of water. He said, "I can't wait to show the guys." Kate could feel his heart.

Johnny grew up in North Carolina. An old friend from home says he was a talented paramedic – "smart enough to be a doctor" – but he ran into problems with drugs. Johnny says, "Yeah, tell me about bad luck. But don't get me wrong. I'm here because of my own decisions. I [have] no one to blame but myself."

Then he made that one good decision, that wildly generous \$20 decision ... and everything changed.

Kate and her boyfriend, Mark D'Amico, started a GoFundMe page for Johnny, with a goal of \$10,000 – first and last month's rent and some expense money. Kate wrote, "With a place to be able to clean up every night and get a good night's sleep, his life can get back to normal.... All Johnny needs is one little break."

By Thanksgiving, he had it: Donations had exceeded a quarter of a million dollars.

Kate and Mark have set up Johnny in a hotel until they find him permanent housing. On Thanksgiving Day, Mark bought Johnny a computer. Johnny is eager to start over. But he says the money they've raised is well more than he'll take. He's excited to donate the rest to a good cause.

*Let every heart prepare!*