

# FAITH matters

September 1, 2025

*Matthew 25:35 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in."*



Like the one above, Scripture has many verses instructing us about the core principle of caring for our neighbors and strangers alike. To that end, I am fortunate enough to have an old family heirloom sitting on my mantle to remind me of this sacred duty. It's a small ship in a bottle, at least 95 years old, with faded paint. The glue sticking the hull to the bottle has worn away so it slides around a little. However, the mooring line is still attached to the inside of the bottle cap and the masts and their rigging are straight and taut. It definitely would not cause excitement on the *Antiques Road Show*. Like many antiques, its value lies in the story behind it, which goes something like this.

During the 1930's my father lived with his mother and two younger sisters outside the small town of Perrysburg, Ohio. One day an old gentlemen knocked on the side door and asked if there was work he could do in exchange for a hot meal. This was a common occurrence as many men were out of work due to the Great Depression. As usual, my grandmother instructed him to go down to the barn where the children would show him what had to be put up or taken down, while she prepared lunch. (For the record I know that in 2025 we would never let a stranger interact with children but I think times were more innocent 95 years ago.)

Once he had completed his chores and likely been interrogated by my father as to who his favorite football and baseball teams were, (the correct responses being the Michigan Wolverines and Detroit Tigers, respectively) they returned to the side porch for lunch. Upon finishing his meal the old man thanked my grandmother for her hospitality. He then told her he was a veteran and would be returning in a few weeks to march in the Decoration Day Parade and at that time would bring a special present for the family. (The story goes he served in the Civil War. I've done the math and that seems highly unlikely but I won't be a wet blanket and fact check my own grandmother!)

The children of course were quite excited about the prospect of a surprise gift. My grandmother cautioned them that the old soldier might not return if he found work elsewhere or had to

go help his own family. However, much to everyone's delight on the appointed day he appeared again at the side door. He was dressed smartly in his faded blue uniform and presented the ship in a bottle to my grandmother. The old soldier thanked her once again for her kindness then walked off toward town never to be seen again.

Since that day long ago this modest keepsake has had an honored place; first on my grandmother's mantle, then my parents' and now mine. It is a tangible reminder that while it may no longer be prudent to feed strangers in our homes, we can support those organizations which address these basic needs such as St. Andrews, STAMP, BACN and The Salvation Army.

In the grand scheme of things I know this may seem like a trivial event. Maybe the Trents just have a boring family history or perhaps sometimes the small encounters are more meaningful and lasting than great overtures. In any event, I wonder if the old gentleman ever dreamed his small gift would become a family treasure and a reminder that the kindness of strangers goes both ways.

*Hebrews 13:2 "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."*

~Written by Jim Trent

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