

Recently the Kansas City school district considered a proposal that would pay students for scoring high on tests. Some people thought children would be more motivated if you salaried them. Someone else suggested if kids do well on tests, you should pay their parents. If the parents are motivated, the kids will be motivated. Both proposals assume that income is more valuable than education, that people will act virtuously if they are paid for it.

It's a false assumption, of course. People don't expect money for everything. Sometimes people learn to make the world a better place. Sometimes they help their neighbor out of love.

You don't have to help people. When you're driving out of a parking lot and someone wants in front of you, you don't have to let them in. When you see a stranger drop a \$10 bill, you don't have to tell them. If your neighbor has a drug habit, you don't have to report it. If a service agency needs volunteers, you don't have to help. But a lot of people do. They may not end up with all the money, all the property or all the celebrity. They may actually lose something they've worked to obtain. But people who help other people get something else - they get a satisfaction inside that money cannot buy.

It is hard to explain why Jesus suffered the way he did. He had more power than the troops who arrested him, more power than Pilate who tried him, and more power than the people who sentenced him. But he endured the shame, the torture and the cross for people yet unborn, for people he completely loved. To those who didn't know better, it looked like Jesus had lost everything - his family, his friends, his clothing, his message and his life. But that wasn't true. Jesus gained everything: salvation, forgiveness, devotion and disciples.

The suffering servant in today's first reading carried infirmities on behalf of other people. Other people committed the offenses, but the servant took the blows. Because of this, the servant won forgiveness for others. He wasn't paid for it. He startled people by his goodness.

We are surrounded by examples of suffering for others, from soldiers killed in action to parents who care for their kids. There is no way to pay people for sacrifice. We don't have to help other people, but when we do, we gain more than wealth, and we learn what Jesus taught, the importance of love.