

In the fall of 2002, Michael Wynne was a successful attorney in the Vancouver area. He and his wife, Mary, had sent their five children to study at Gonzaga University. In his spare time, he enjoyed baking and developing his own cookie recipes.

But Wynne's life took a dark turn one October night when his youngest daughter, Susie, a college sophomore, suffered a near-fatal fall that left her severely injured and legally blind.

Wayne got angry; and part of him was angry at God.

With his "poor coping skills," as he puts it, he started drinking. But this was done in secret.

In his own words, he said: "I was a closet drinker...At the end, I was drinking three or four bottles of wine a night by myself."

Medical bills piled up, and Wynne started "robbing Peter to pay Paul." He got caught, pleaded guilty to stealing from clients, and was sentenced to five years in prison.

In September of 2010, Michael Wynne boarded the chain bus to the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton.

However, as his story continued, while you can screw up at any time, what he'd also find is you can respond to that and change.

Prison was rough on Wynne, who was 63 when he entered.

He fell ill and almost died. He spent about three months in the prison hospital before being transferred to two different prisons.

He'd never had a run-in with the law before, and some of the younger inmates gave him a hard time at first.

But rather than retreat into TV or card games, Wynne decided to spend his time in prison serving those around him. He realized he could use his professional skills and experience to help guys overcome some of the bureaucratic obstacles they were facing on the outside — obtaining necessary documents, preparing résumés, clearing up traffic tickets.

He saw that a lot of people in prison couldn't read or write. News traveled fast in prison, and soon Wynne had a long list of "clients." Deacon Jack Roscoe, who served as chaplain at Cedar Creek, remembers the first time he saw Wynne walk into the prison chapel.

He saw Wayne carrying around a big sheaf of papers and helping everybody, from an inmate trying to get a driver's license in California, to this, to that, to the next thing. Deacon Roscoe recruited Wynne to serve as a lector at Communion services, and began helping him rediscover his Catholic faith. Together they watched Father Robert Barron's Catholicism video series, and Deacon Roscoe gave Wynne a copy of Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*

Wayne started reading about anything to do with faith at the prison library, and spending more time in prayer.

Deacon Roscoe arranged for a priest to visit the prison, and Wynne made his first confession in maybe 20 years. As he put it "That was a big release, like a big weight off my shoulders," he said.

Wynne began to see the help he was giving his fellow inmates in light of Jesus 'words in the Gospel of Matthew: "I was ... in prison and you visited me. ... Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:35-40)

He realized, "If I can help some of these guys getting out, I'm kind of doing God's work."

Since being released Wynne continued to do God's work to help former inmates.

A felony conviction can be a huge barrier to securing employment and housing. So Wynne often meets at coffee shops or McDonald's with guys who have just been released, helping them to find housing and work. In the four years after his release, he's helped more than 100 men get jobs or places to live, and wrote a book for ex inmates about re-entry into society that covers everything from how to get a birth certificate and a Social Security card, to dealing with unpaid traffic tickets and child support, to writing a résumé and nailing a job interview.

In the words of Fr. Tom Belleque, a priest who Michael has worked with: “What gives him so much credibility is that he served his time and he understands from the inside, and I don’t think there’s any better minister than somebody who understands it personally...That’s part of the cross and resurrection of the Gospel — that we take the crosses in our lives and turn them into new life. And one of the best ways we can do that is to serve others.”

One of the men Wynne has served is his former “celly” at Cedar Creek, Robert Russell. When Russell was released in 2014, Wynne was there for him and recommended him for a job as a welder at Pacific Precast, Inc., an ornamental concrete company in Vancouver. Now Russell runs the business as the production manager.

He says he doesn’t have many people he could call a true friend, but Wayne is one of them. As he puts it, “He’d give you the shirt off his back, he’d do anything he could for you,” Russell added. “He’s a blessing to anybody that is in his life.”

Of course Jesus gives us much more than the shirt off his back; He gives us his life. And this day, this week, invites us to be, like the donkey in the opening Gospel, untethered and liberated, and to do this for one another for the Master has need of you and me.

As we are all aware, inside all of us is such a capacity for good, but also the capacity for evil.

The Passion shows us sin in all it's ugly forms. But it also shows us God's response, that of unconditional love.

Sin has a way of destroying us. Little by little, it creeps in; Michael went from a successful attorney to being angry, and letting the hurt and anger cloud his judgment and turned to alcohol and eventually stealing, and it caught up with him. But in his darkest moment, he realized something: that he was loved by God.

Like the donkey in the opening Gospel, sometimes we are tethered to a sin; anger; lust; sloth; whatever it may be. Like Michael, we sometimes hide this or think we can control it. But on our own we are enslaved. Sure, it may

remain hidden for a while, but it will come out eventually. So rather than pretend it's not there, may we realize we are loved and forgiven. Jesus takes on our sins and lays down His life out of love. Maybe we've been hurt by a tragedy like Michael was. God knows what that is like because He went through it too. This week may we contemplate again how God stands with us and we are never alone.

But like Michael, may we also be aware of the words Jesus says to the apostles to relay to the owner of the donkey: the master has need of it. That's you and me. Jesus sets us free but as Fr. Tom said, we use our cross and turn it into new life. The master has need of you. Sometimes we get down on ourselves and compare ourselves to others. Sometimes we use our gifts for our own glory. Sometimes we stay focused on the past out of shame. But when God sets us free and forgives, He calls us to do the same for one another. We look at our gifts; Michael realized he was good with people; he had skills as an attorney; and he used those to change hundreds of lives around and give the incarcerated hope. So what about us? Never forget how much you matter to others, and how God put you here for a reason. Never forget what a profound impact you have when you use what you've been given to make this world a better place, by being

present to others, by volunteering, by helping others to make changes in their lives and to find God, and that in small actions we can do such extraordinary things for the people around us, glorifying God through using the gifts He has given us.

Sin is indeed ugly. But the final answer of our Lord is not to condemn, but to liberate and to love, for the master has need of you and me. May we rejoice in that and find peace, allowing the Lord to untether us, and using the love He gives us to do the same for one another.