

The most important person

The famous Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, wrote a short story with a timeless message. Entitled, “The Three Questions” is about a king who wanted to be the best king possible. However, he had three questions: When is the best time to act? Who are the best people to have around you? What is the best thing you can do?

Obviously, many people, counselors and sages, offered advice to the king about calendars and wise men and right behavior. But since there seemed to be no agreement among his counselors, the king sought further help.

He had heard that a holy man lived as a hermit in the woods. So the king traveled with his guards to see the holy man. About a mile from the hermit’s hut, the king told his guards to wait there. He didn’t want to intimidate the hermit with his entourage.

As the king approached the hermit, he asked the three questions. The hermit didn’t reply, but kept on plowing the land in front of his hut. The king noticed that he looked tired, so he offered to plow while the hermit rested. They took turns the rest of the afternoon, but the hermit would not answer the king’s three questions.

As evening was falling, a man came running out of the woods, badly wounded and bleeding. The king ran to the man’s side, and helped to stop the loss of blood. He and the hermit then carried the wounded man inside the hut and put him in the hermit’s bed. Exhausted from the day, the king fell asleep.

When he awoke the next morning, the wounded man turned to the king and confessed what had happened. “I had intended to kill you today,” said the man. “I was angry about some land you had taken from my family. I knew you would leave your guards at a distance, so I planned to ambush you as you returned during the day. When you didn’t return during the day, I stepped out of my hiding place, and your guards spotted me. They wounded me as I ran off. O King, you saved my life. If you will forgive me for what I had intended to do to you, I will become your most faithful servant.”

The king forgave the man. Then he went to the hermit, and said: “You have yet to

answer my three questions. Why are you giving me no answer?

The hermit replied: "You have found the answer. You see, you saw that I was tired, and you helped me. Because you stayed with me all afternoon, you were not killed on your way home. Because you forgave your enemy, you have turned an enemy into a friend. You have answered your own questions.

"The best time to act is now. The best person to be around is the one you are with right now. The right thing to do is to do good to that person!"

A wonderful parable, is it not? Many of us wait for the right time or the right moment to do something. The right time to act is now. The past was once now. The future will become now. We only live in the now.

We often think the important people are somewhere else. But the people around us are the most important people.

And we often see ourselves being heroes somewhere else, or doing some act of daring for all to see. But doing good to the person closest to us is at the heart of life.

Perhaps Jesus said it best when he said: "What you do to the least person, you do to me!" God is closer to us than we usually think.