

*Rev. Dr. Mark Hargreaves:* Today is Outreach Sunday and it's our custom on this day to invite many of our outreach partners, and the organizations that we work with to come, and there's a fair afterwards, and to find out the work that they've been up to. And it's a great joy to look around and see some of our partners sitting here in the congregation. Welcome and a special welcome to Beth Beall, who's involved in an organization called Vida Joven, which we've supported for years. They run a network of orphanages south of the border. And we've known Beth for a long time and it's great to have her with us today to offer our sermon. Thank you.

*Elizabeth Beall:* Thanks. Oh, good morning. Good people of St. James. You can hear me okay in the back? Okay. As Father Mark said, my name is Beth Beall, and it really feels wonderful to be with you. As Mark said, I've gotten to know many of you over the years and so it feels like coming home to be here. So, thanks for your welcome. I am the director of a San Diego based nonprofit called the Vida Joven Foundation. And at Vida Joven, we are joyfully passionate about caring for God's orphaned children from Tijuana all the way to south of Ensenada. This morning, I have a couple board of directors' members here as well. They're also parishioners of your church, Jill Sugar, Lynn Hadley, so I hope afterward you'll talk with us and see some pictures of the kids, et cetera. In 2026, you and I, St. James, we are going to be partnering with nine orphanages.

We just bumped the number up, with nine orphanages serving almost 200 children altogether. We are so honored to be one of your outreach ministry partners. And while I stand here representing Vida Joven, I want to recognize that this Sunday is about the good work your parish is doing in this community and around the world through all of your outreach ministry partners. And so, to the other outreach ministries that are here today, thank you for your good work. Our world needs you to keep shining your light. And we all need to remember that the darkness will not and cannot extinguish that light.

I'd like you to listen once again to the opening words from Psalm 40. Here's my paraphrase. God, I was in a scary place. I needed you. I waited for you to come. You heard my cry. You lifted me up out of the dangerous pit I was in. You lifted me up out of the

mire and the mess. You put my feet on solid ground. You steadied my legs. You even put a new song in my mouth. So, hold those words from our Psalm in your heart as I tell you about a little boy. If you make your way into the fellowship hall after church, you'll get to see a picture of him. This little boy is a child whose life you are saving, St. James. And I mean save in the best sense of the word. Save from the word "salve", healing.

Picture the city of Tijuana, Mexico. The year is 2023, the month is January. The morning air is especially chilly on this particular day. In this scene, you can see all the hustle and bustle and chatter of the city. You see people moving about, you see cars and motorcycles whooshing by. And as you gaze upon this scene, you notice in a corner, a child who's huddling against a building. This child does not look okay to you. He's eight years old. You can see that he's wearing a thin T-shirt and ragged jeans. He doesn't have a winter coat on this cold winter morning. You notice his toes poking out of his ill-fitting sneakers. This child's name is Angel [*AN HEL*], Angel.

Angel was born there in the city of Tijuana. He was born to a mom and dad who battled the demons of drug addiction. Angel was born HIV positive and without access to the medications he needed. Angel was also born into a home of violence. This child was abused. He was born into a home that was not safe for him. When Angel was three years old, his mother died of AIDS and Angel remained in the care of relatives and the abuse and the violence against this child continued. So, by the time he was six or seven, Angel was spending as much time as possible on the streets so as not to be at home.

Some of you here this morning, some of you know firsthand what it is to be a child living in fear. And of course, Angel didn't go to school because school is a luxury when you're trying to survive. Well, on this day, this chilly January morning of 2023, a caring police officer who I would say was himself an angel, that caring police officer saw Angel on the street during school hours. The officer approached this little boy who was skinny and scared, hungry and as that police officer approached Little Angel, that little boy said, "Please don't take me home. Please, please, please don't take me home." Fortunately, that police officer believed Angel. The officer took the little boy

to social services, a social worker formally removed Angel from his home so an investigation could get underway. The social worker learned that little Angel was HIV positive and it was in that moment she, the social worker, picked up the phone and she called Eunime Orphanage in Tijuana. Eunime is E-U-N-I-M-E. Eunime.

Why did she call Eunime? Well, the mission of Eunime is to care for abandoned and abused children who are HIV positive and Eunime is one of our partner orphanages. It's part of the Vida Joven family of orphanages and what this means is that it is one of your orphanages, St. James. When the social worker took eight-year-old Angel to the orphanage that day, the orphanage doors swung open. Remember how our Psalm talked about God rescuing, pulling up out of the pit. What does God's rescue look like? What does God's help and healing look like? It looks like you, St. James, as you hold these orphanage doors open so that the little children can come. Your parish provides prayers and funding to keep these orphanages going. You faithfully provide outreach ministry grants. Tomorrow, a group of you will be assembling care packages for the caregivers at the orphanages.

And did you know there are people sitting beside you in these pews who have stepped up their commitment even further? We have a special group of folks called La Familia, the family. These are folks who are contributing to the children's wellbeing every single month. Please feel free to talk with us at our table about joining that group after service. When Angel arrived at the orphanage that day in January 2023, he was suffering from severe malnourishment and his frail body, of course, showed signs of the physical abuse he had endured for so long. On top of all this, as you can imagine, Angel was in desperate need of the medication to treat the virus in his body. But there, at the orphanage, at your orphanage, St. James, there at the orphanage, Angel was immediately put on the same dietary and medication regimen as all the other children there, all of whom are HIV positive. He began to get healthy food to build up his immune system, regular blood work. And there at your orphanage, Angel began to go to school regularly for the first time in his life.

So, fast-forward three years. Today, Angel is 11 years old. He's really chatty and really sweet and he loves karate. *[gestures]* Father Mark said I had to do that again, so I'm trying to do karate. I don't know how. But Angel loves karate. To return to the imagery of Psalm 40, your kindness, St. James, you have lifted this child out of danger, and you've placed his feet on the solid ground of God's love. Of course, Angel still bears on his body and in his psyche, the wounds of his earlier suffering in life. You and I can't undo the horrific things that happened to this child in his past, just like we can't undo the horrific things that have happened in the past to any of those whom we love. But that doesn't mean we can do nothing, because today as we are here, Angel is not waking up in fear today.

Today, this delightful boy is waking up in safety at his orphanage home. Today, he will be well-fed. Today, Angel will get the medication he needs. Today, he will be surrounded by competent and caring caregivers. This is all possible, St. James, because when you hear the cry of a child like Angel, you say, "On our watch, dear child, you will not live on the streets. On our watch, Angel, you will not be abused. On our watch, you will not go hungry. On our watch, the doors of your orphanage home will remain open. As long as we are here, you will live in safety, child. As long as we are here, there will be a new song in your mouth."

Thank you, St. James for being part of God's holy and healing and helping work in this heartbreaking and sometimes truly horrific world, God's light and God's healing are still on the move. And I think you're here because you believe that God's light and healing are still on the move, flowing through you. So, thanks be to God and thanks be to you. *[gestures around the church]* Thanks be to you. Thanks be to you. Amen. *[applause]*