

Jesus was a keen observer of people and human nature. He was well aware of the expected social norms and customs of his day. He also knew the hearts and minds of people and how they reacted to places of honor and prestige. Don't think we have changed much in the intervening years.

Almost weekly we hear or read of people who in certain circumstances demand, "Do you know who I am?", or, "Do you know how important I am?" Recently we have a Seattle area lawyer who is trying to keep her DUI arrest records from being made public. It is not that she is being singled out – the news reports that over 17,000 such records are released to the public every year. It is because she wants to be the exception, "Do you know who I am?"

The world has not changed. We long for places of honor and prestige. We want to be seen as being important. Our culture celebrates those who get to go to the head of the line, get immediate reservations and seating in the best places and who are immediately recognized as someone important.

I want to share some thoughts on these two passages of Scripture that we read this morning beginning with the Psalmist. The Psalmist is celebrating God's blessings. Happiness comes from a respect, fear and love for God. Now, I don't see the Psalmist suggesting that God's blessings are wealth and riches. He is rather sharing how we should use those blessings from God when they do come. Look at the images the Psalmist uses as he describes a person who has been blessed by God.

- \*They are gracious, merciful and righteous. (3)
- \*They deal generously with other people, lend what they have, conduct their affairs with righteousness. (4)
- \*They are secure in the Lord – they daily live out their faith. (7)
- \*They distribute freely and give to the poor. (9)

The bounty and blessings from God are to be shared, not hoarded or stashed away for another day. The Psalmist understands that blessings are a gift from God, not something we have earned, and are to be shared with others. Thus we are happiest when the blessings from God are shared.

Jesus was not unaccustomed to places of honor and prestige. He was often invited to the home of important leaders and people in the community. He would be given a place of honor at the meal (head table). He knew the accepted customs of his day. He may have been the first to be served, given the finest food and wine. He accepted the honors bestowed on him by those around him. Of course, his true glory would be greater than they would ever imagine. As Paul tells us in the second chapter of Philippians, Jesus left the glory of heaven, became a servant and humbled himself from heaven's glory. He knew true places of honor but graciously accepted the places of honor bestowed on him here on earth.

Jesus was also comfortable with the "common" people of the day. He did not mind eating with the poor, the widows, the street people. He was as comfortable in these homes as in others. He would be comfortable in our homes (as they are right now!). He would not complain about mismatched dishes and glasses. Nor would he reject the food of our table. He would celebrate with us, listen to our stories and enjoy his time in our presence. He

would not wish he was somewhere else, somewhere more important. He was comfortable with life, with creation and with the bounty before him.

What he does do is call for a change in our culture, “When you give a party...”

Look at this way. We are gearing up for elections (if you did not know). Now what if, instead of hosting a \$1,000 per plate dinner to raise money from those most influential people in our society (know that may be cheap today but I can’t get my head around that let alone the higher amounts) a politician hosted a dinner and invited the poor, the widows, the orphans and the street people – those who would never have the funds to attend such an event nor the influence to be of any political good. Would it even make the news? They would probably lose the election on earth but... not in heaven!!!

Another example that came to mind is the race for Governor of California. The news reports that one candidate is committed to spend about \$100 million of their own money to win an election to a job that pays about \$200,000 a year. And, how much are they spending of other people’s money? (Something is wrong, on both sides of the political aisle.) What if that money were spent on the salaries of teachers, police, firefighters? What if the money was given to help out homeless shelters, food programs and health clinics? It would probably lift us out of the current “recession” far faster than we could imagine. And, we would be acting more like the Psalmist and Christ.

Putting it in simple terms, What if Christians started truly following Christ? Most of what we term social services today are the result of past actions by the church. I find it interesting to hear politicians saying that churches, synagogues, mosques need to step up and do more today to help out those in need – calling us to do more while they spend millions to get elected. Something is wrong here.

Hospitals, orphanages, homeless shelters are products of the Church. People who were willing to go the extra mile. People who were willing to love their enemies and provide for them. People who were willing to risk their very lives in caring for the world (Christians during the plague is a good example of what happens when we care one for the other). People who were not looking for places of honor and prestige. People who worked humbly in the background following their Christ by taking on the form of a servant. Being like Christ. Not dismissing honors but not seeking them. People who put Christ-like action in the forefront of their lives.

More I read Jesus’ statements in Luke my thoughts kept going back to a little book by John Shore, Penguins, Pain and the Whole Shebang. Shared this with you about two years ago (July 2008) but it is still as powerful for me today as it was then. John writes as if God is speaking,

Now I want to tell you something that I think might sound a little...well, I have no idea how it might sound. Obviously self-serving, probably. But here’s a truth: You would not *believe* how much of what is now considered an “act of God” could be prevented or radically mitigated if everyone down there on Ol’ Blue Skies would pool their resources and start working together, instead of spending so much time and energy working against one another.

The human race has *so* much more power than it realizes. You're all about one discovery away—from something like, say, how sound waves can be compressed and harnessed to interact with matter—from practically putting me out of a job.

I'm serious. If everyone on earth, right now, began truly adhering to the "One for All, and All for One!" creed, in about twenty years you'd be living in a world so different from the one you're in right now you'd think you were on another planet.

Which come to think of it, you could actually be.

In other words, no fair complaining about what you can't do before you've done everything you can. No fair throwing up your hands, when rolling up your sleeves is all that's needed. If you can't grasp something, maybe it just means you haven't opened your arms wide enough.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

A stitch in times saves nine.

A penny saved is like a dime earned after taxes.

A babbling God is better than no God at all.

What I'm saying is this: (*This is the one that still causes shivers down my spine, sic*) **There was a little boy in Ethiopia who would have cured cancer, if only he hadn't died of starvation.**

Jesus said, "And when you have a party..."

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NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985

NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989

Shore, John, Penguins, Pain and the Whole Shebang, Seabury Press, NY, NY 2008 (pp 67-68)