

One of the most important lessons we learn early in life is that love is a limitless commodity. Grandparents can love 38 grandchildren with the same quality of love they shower on one and only. However, there have been honor/shame societies, where Honor was considered a static limited supply. In an honor/shame society, the only means by which one person wins greater honor is if others lose honor; i.e., if others are scandalized, are made to FEAR ever seeking recognition or Honor again.

One of my favorite books in college was Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, about a man who provides for his parents and sister. He is the bread winner and spokesman for the family who basically does everything. But one morning he wakes up to discover: he is being transformed into a 6' tall Cockroach. And the question of the story becomes who the metamorphosis is really all about, the man, or the rest of the family, who without his dominance, each step up developing more personality because he is not present?

In African cultures there is what is described as "The Tall Poppy Syndrome." Poppy flowers grow wild in fields and not only are beautiful, they tend to be of a uniform height. The belief is that whenever one poppy flower grows taller, or is more notable than others, the rest of the field SO FEARS that one, they will crowd out and kill the one that is different from the rest. SO also with people and animals. The concern is not only to keep an eye on one's enemies, but especially on the Fears of one's own friends and family.

Jesus came to his own hometown, having accomplished miracles among the Gentiles, having taught in Parables with authority even scribes did not possess. But rather than taking pride in his accomplishments, the FIREWORKS OF THIS JULY 4th began "Who does Jesus think he is?" "Is this not James', John's and Jose's brother." Jesus stood out, and others belittled him to bring him down, in a society of Honor versus Shame.

Two weeks ago we described the fishermen sailing across the Sea of Galilee with Jesus. A lesson of sailing is that you cannot simply pick a destination and drive straight there, instead sailors need to cut back and forth across the wind, (tacking to the other side, coming about and tacking back), each time making diagonal progress toward the destination you want to reach. The Gospel of Mark has described Jesus Teaching in Parables, gaining in authority. Crossing to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, among the Gentiles, where he accomplished Miracles. Crossing back over to the Jewish culture, Jesus was not in the same place he had been before crossing over, he had AUTHORITY coming to his Hometown of Nazareth.

One of the things we learned in recent weeks from reading of the Parables and Miracles in the Gospel, a story can be accepted at face value, but there can also be deeper and deeper levels of meaning. Not only has Jesus not returned to the place where he had been respected and honored for his Parables; in his home community, he was scandalized. While the Catholic Church emphasizes Mary's perpetual Virginity as a symbol of purity & innocence, The Gospel of Mark names younger brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Can you imagine what it was to be the little brother, or the brother-in-law of Jesus?

I was the 3rd born in our household growing up, and going to school, teachers invariably compared you to your elder brothers as if they were perfect... "Your brother was so good at this, why aren't you?" Our father could not be bothered with trying to figure out who had done what, he would simply call "Dougkeithcraigmark get over here," and later in life calling us each by the wrong name. Judy's mother created a honey-do list of projects that she would tape to the refrigerator. As the first Son-in-law, I thought it my way of getting in good with the family to complete this list! But her husband and son would laugh, knowing you can never accomplish everything on Mom's Refrigerator Honey-do list. At least until Judy's younger sister married a 6'3" Satellite Engineer, who truly could accomplish miracles.

But there are deeper levels to this STORY-AFTER the Parables and Healing Miracles. Unlike Matthew & Luke, Mark never tidied-up Jesus' family scandal with infancy stories of Joseph taking his bride to

Bethlehem, or protecting the family by secreting them to Egypt. By outing Jesus, as “Mary’s Boy” they were hurling insults, that in this ancient Patriarchal culture, Mary had not been married to give Jesus, Joseph’s name. But even more, as the eldest son, why was Jesus not providing for his mother, Mary? Jewish Carpenters were not much more than a traveling salesman, going wherever work led them; but instead, Jesus was sailing across the water to provide miracles to Gentiles?

At one time, a neighboring pastor asked me “What themes are your favorites to preach on?” Suddenly, I realized that underlying every sermon is a theme of TRUST. We live in a world of BROKEN TRUSTS. Last weekend, the Weatherperson promised it would rain every night starting last Sunday! We worked all our lives at Careers, promised a Pension and Golden years, which have been a little tarnished. You promised to make me feel like a Queen, for better & worse, richer & poorer, but instead I have been a care-giver. On this 4th of July, we want our Nation to have Pride as the home of the free and the brave; but our leaders attack one another and differing groups within our citizens. Our troops are coming home from the longest war in our history, and what has it changed? Even GOD, we question and challenge with “WHY LORD?”

I believe the underlying message of the Incarnation, of God becoming One-with-Us, is a redemption of God’s absolute trust. Suffering and dying on the Cross, instead of condemning his persecutors, instead of judging us for how we abandon him, Jesus provided Forgiveness as an act of Trust.

While the primary story in Mark 6 is that Jesus went to his own home-town, and secondarily there are barbs from his own family about his having been illegitimate, and about his not providing for their mother; THERE IS a deeper meaning to this story, that when they would not trust him, Jesus could do very little, he only healed a few people. I believe there is A MISTRANSLATION here, from the bias of the Publishers... it is not that Jesus was astonished by their lack of faith, but by their lack of Belief, their lack of Trust.

In his autobiography, Frederick Buechner described a painting that made a huge impact on his life: The image was of Jesus standing in Churches throughout all the world, WITH HANDS TIED BEHIND HIS BACK, unable to do miraculous works because no one ever expected him to, or even dared ask Jesus to do so.

AND

the most amazing element of this story, is that recognizing what little he could do, Jesus did not get angry, Jesus did not curse the people, or quit being Messiah; instead he commissioned and sent out the disciples, as apostles to carry on what he could not do!

Preachers often try to make a sermon out of what Jesus told the apostles to not take... How many pair of shoes do you have in your closet, how many shirts do you pack when traveling, and Jesus said you could only take one tunic and one pair of sandals.

But I think more important is what he ordered them to take: a partner, to go out in pairs! As individuals, we sometimes misread a circumstance, when we go to the doctors for a diagnosis it is important to have someone else come along, as a witness to help us hear and remember what was said. Which raises an intriguing question, if you were buddying up, which disciple do you want as a traveling companion: Judas, or Doubting Thomas, The Tax Collector, Nathan thinking Nothing Good could happen?

Once upon a time there was a prominent church, that for decades had been known for great preaching and leadership on social causes, but like many churches had fallen on hard times in recent decades. Touring the church, the Deacon described, “20 years ago, we feared the future. We consistently lost members until there were just 50 people left, when something happened. Something changed and we are now having a sort of resurrection or revival.” Someone asked “How do you explain this?” The Deacon responded “Well it had a little to do with our new pastor, but not really.” He went on “He has us in a Bible Study that emphasizes 7 words!” The group groaned at another self-help gimmick. But the Deacon grinned

and said “Those 7 words for Bible Study are “GOD is GOD and You are Not!” We all laughed, but the point is that instead of focusing on to preserve the way things used to be, or who had been responsible for loss, the point is the Church is not about us, IT IS ABOUT GOD.

The ecumenical lectionary pairs this with an Old Testament passage about David. That David was King of the Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin for 7 years and 6 months, during which he and his followers had been at WAR WITH ISRAEL and with King Saul. But when the war had ended, those who had followed the former King came and pledged their loyalty to the new King, to unite the Nation. Two sides of OUR NATION have been at war, hating each other for FAR too long. What is it going to take, for political enemies within our own Nation to compromise, to listen to one another instead of acting with retaliation and fear?

Fascinating about David, that in an effort to bring the two political sides together after all the years of fighting between Israel and Judah, David chose a different CITY for the Capitol that had no prior allegiance to either side. During the Crusades, Jerusalem which had become known as a city of Israel, was conquered by the Muslims, then by the Christians. Following WWII the city was divided into 4 Quadrants: The Jewish Quarter, the Armenian Quarter, the Christian Quarter and the Muslim Quarter. But in all the ancient history, Jerusalem was never identified as belonging to any one Nation, not to Judah or to Israel, but was identified as the City of David, the City of God.

Too easily readers have heard these words as being discriminatory against the Blind and the Lame; instead this passage has several meanings. First that the ancient Jebusite City was so well fortified by numerous concentric circular granite rock walls, 40 feet tall and 4 - 6 feet thick, the Jebusites believed they needed no army or guards for defense, even those who were not strong could defend the city.

Second, the Bible reveals the battle plan by which David and his private Guerilla guards were able to take the city... When there are concentric stone walls around a fortification 40 feet tall, 4 – 6 feet thick, without doors or windows, search for underground tunnels bringing in fresh water!

Third, in reference to THE BLIND & THE LAME, at the City of Jerusalem on a free afternoon, four of us waded through Hezekiah’s Tunnel, the ancient Waterspout of fresh water for Jerusalem. Which runs underground from outside the outermost wall, coming up precisely at the center of the Old City in a place which has from that time until this, been known as The Pool of Siloam. And the Pool of Siloam was a location of MIRACLE HEALINGS, where the BLIND & DEAF, unable to WALK would be Baptized and healed.

But I think most of all, it is not that the Blind and Lame would not be allowed into Jerusalem, but that in the New Jerusalem, the City of God, there would no longer be ailments or suffering, no blindness or lame.