

SERMON AT GELORUP 28/8/2022:

OS22c SUNDAY BETWEEN 28 AUGUST AND 3 SEPTEMBER:

GEOFF CHADWICK:

LUKE 14.1, 14.7-14

“BEING HUMBLE OR BEING HUMBLLED?”

Some years ago, I attended a Religious Education conference in Brisbane. Several hundred people from all around Australia were there, but there was only one other person there that I knew. It was the Rabbi from Carmel College (The Jewish school in Perth).

Sounds like a joke: *A Priest, a Rabbi and a Teacher walked into a conference...*

So you know how it works. In a mob of strangers, you gravitate to the one person you know.

And so he and I got together for a chat whilst we waited for the conference to begin.

“Are you with anyone?” he asked.

“No” I said.

“Well, come and sit with me” as he motioned to an empty chair.

So I sat with him, and as the time for the opening of the Conference drew near, the nearby chairs began to fill.

First came the Chief Rabbi of Australia, whom my friend knew so it made sense to be introduced to him. Then came the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, then the local Member of Parliament, then the Mayor of Brisbane, then the Opening Guest Speaker along with a few other dignitaries!

As the conference was opened they were all introduced to the assembled, except me of course, who just happened to be sitting amongst them as a “ring-in”.

Then Jesus words came into my mind:

‘When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, “Give this

person your place”, and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.” (Lk 14:8-9, NRSV)

Then I wondered, had my Rabbi friend actually done the opposite?

But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, “Friend, move up higher”; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. (Lk 14:10, NRSV)

Had I been honoured by my Rabbi friend, or was I about to be humbled?!

It was a bit nerve wracking though- to have everyone’s eyes gazing at me wondering what my “exulted” social ranking might be!

I must say, I did have an enjoyable conference. The Rabbi and I kept each other’s company, which was especially good at mealtimes when he shared his over generous portions of orthodox Kosher food with me. The caterers had to import it especially for him, along with properly washed and sealed kosher crockery and cutlery. (This was a long time before COVID-19!)

I just thought of an advertising slogan the caterers could have used:

*“**The** caters of choice for ravishing rabbis and veracious vicars!”*

(As an aside, it amazes me how radical and provocative this act of eating together could be in other parts of the world. If only people of difference would eat together more often!)

Now back to the passage.

In Jesus’ time social status was obvious and everything. Your accent, what you wore, where you lived, and who your friends were, were all signals to the wider community of your standing. Higher, of course, was considered better.

Do we, in our present day and age fare any better?

Recently I saw a TV show giving glimpses into the operations of world-famous ritzy hotels.

Apart from the sumptuous décor, I found myself becoming appalled by the ill-treatment of

the “lesser” patrons by the whims of the “rich and famous”. In particular, there was an episode where the concierge “moved heaven and earth” to book a hairdressing appointment for exactly the time the rich and famous client demanded. Some “lesser” person just had to be inconvenienced by the selfish whim of the rich!

I believe the ancient philosopher Epicurus was correct when he suggested being too rich leads to greed and arrogance.

Now whilst I’m in the mood for anecdotes, one of my colleagues told me of a time they were waiting to board a stalled flight from Sydney to Los Angeles. The carrier was a famous Australian brand whose name is not Qantas. The plane was left waiting on the tarmac for many hours because a severe storm had shut the airport. Up in the passenger lounge, there seemed to be several types of passengers:

- 1) The rich business class demanding that the flight leave on time and that someone should do something about the weather!
- 2) the economy passengers who were miffed, but understood that even Qantas airlines could not control the weather,
- 3) and young families struggling with squealing, squirmy cantankerous kids.

So guess what the flight attendants did once the plane was cleared to fly?

They reissued the boarding passes.

The families with squirming kids were allocated the business class seats, and the loudest, most obnoxious, complainers were made to file through the business class area, past the families through to the economy seats near the loudest engines!

Something tells me I love the Australian culture. “Don’t get angry, just get even!”

(My colleague was one of those with the young children!)

I wonder if you know the *Jesus the Game Changer* video series? There's one on Leadership which is part of a series that explores how Christianity has changed the world for the better. In this episode a distinction is made between "being humble" and "being humbled". In the ancient world you were humble because you had been humbled. Either by a superior foreign power, a cruel master, or a callous husband.

Here "being humbled", means to be "crushed into the earth" (which is the origin of the word "humble" - Latin: "humus" meaning "earth".)

Importantly, Jesus is not telling us to be "humbled" (ie crushed), rather he is telling us to be "humble" that is, not crushed into the earth but "of the earth".

There is a big difference, and it's one I wish the sufferers of Domestic Violence or Low Self-esteem were aware of.

Being humbled is about being pulverized.

Being humble, on the other hand, is about having the strength of the earth.

It's about confidence in a firm foundation,

it's about support-both for yourself and others,

and it's about knowing that you have all you need to grow.

Those who are humble are not crushed by oppression, but stand firm in the face of it.

Those who are humble do not boast about their abilities, but are they are firm in the knowledge that they are God given.

Those who are humble do not crush others because they know what it is to be close to the earth. They know that all good things are rooted and grow in the good earth.

May I be so bold to say, that if being humble, is crushing you, or stifling your growth or hiding your abilities, then perhaps you are mistaken- you are "being humbled" rather than "being humble".

If you are in this situation, I suggest you seek council with a wise person because I have seen too many people hurt by what I call “door-mat” theology.

God does not want us to be “door mats”. Yes he asks us to be humble, but that humility is to be a source of strength in adversity; to be an agent of growth, and to be a reminder that we are of the earth.

I finish with Marianne Williamson’s poem which Nelson Mandela is said to have quoted in his inauguration speech in 1994. (You may have heard it before, but it’s worth hearing again).

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small does not serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel
insecure around you.
We are all meant to shine, as children do.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It is not just in some of us; it is in all of us and as we let our own light shine, we
unconsciously give others permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

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1994 Inaugural Speech of Nelson Mandela

