

Parable of the Wrapper and the Tailor

It was a Sunday and I was in a hurry to get to get to a mission church in Monterey County, California. I was meeting the diocesan Bishop where I would serve as his chaplain. I ran into a McDonalds to grab a quick Egg McMuffin. The place was empty except for me, the counter server wrapping breakfast sandwiches, and a cook. I stood at the counter and the server looked over his shoulder, saw me, and continued to wrap the McMuffins. He finished and turned around and said “May I serve you?”

At that moment I had a blinding flash of the obvious, he saw his job as wrapping McMuffins and I was an interruption.

That same Sunday I was heading back to San Jose to again serve as Bishop’s chaplain for the the installation of a new Rector that evening. Somewhere along the way I misplaced my collar button. I somehow thought it would be easy to find one at a formalwear store in one of the San Jose malls. No luck at all, but the formalwear clerk told me to try Nordstroms in the mall, “they have everything.” I headed to their formal wear department and the clerk searched in drawers and boxes but no luck. He then said “come with me and we will see the tailor.” In the back of the fitting rooms was a small office with sewing machines and lots of suit pants and coats waiting for alterations. The tailor was busy putting a cuff on a pair of pants, but looked up immediately and asked “how can I help you?” I described a collar button and she said “I will be right back.” She returned minutes later and had attached a small shirt button to a larger one with reinforced thread in-between. “Try this”she said. I worked perfectly. “How much do I owe you for this?” I asked. “Oh nothing “ she said, “We are a service oriented company and we are happy to serve you if we can.”

Two models of service I experienced a few hours apart. Which one, the wrapper or the tailor had the true servants heart?

I believe answering Gods call to us is rarely neatly packaged. It comes as an interruption. We are just finding our rhythm and tempo in our daily tasks and an opportunity comes unexpectedly to serve. It may come from

the pulpit, from announcements in the middle of the service, at coffee hour, on the street, a call can come from anywhere. Last week Karens sermon was a call to action regarding gun violence, another opportunity to serve. God's ways and schedules are different from the ways of the world as Jesus told us in this mornings gospel. Peter, Jesus' close friend was trying to silence Jesus' speech as it did not fit the Messiah narrative of the time. This tells us at times the people closest to us may try to change our minds regarding our call if it does not fit a narrative of our time.

To the disciples, their idea of a Messiah was like this. They viewed the time of King David as the greatest of days. They dreamed of a time where there would arise another king in the line of David to make them great in righteousness and power.

The Jews did not know what it was to be free and independent. They looked for divine power to do what humans were helpless to do.

The time before the messiah was to come was called the time of chaos, every bond would be torn apart. Into the chaos would come Elijah who would herald in the Messiah who would bring a new Jerusalem down to earth. The Jews who were dispersed across the earth would be gathered up in the new Jerusalem and a new age of peace would come forever.

The great hope of the Israelite people at that time was freedom from the Roman overlords. Having seen Jesus' miracles, experienced his magnetic personality as they followed him, and watched him draw enthusiastic crowds, it would have been totally natural for them to assume that Jesus would somehow challenge the servility they lived under with the Romans. Everything they had seen Jesus do and heard him say until this time had been impressive and had no doubt spurred within them big hopes for the future.

But now this. Jesus astonished and dismayed them with the news that -- contrary to all their hopes and expectations -- he would undergo suffering, be rejected by the religious leaders and be killed.

It was the worst possible thing Jesus could have said.

Peter -- always the impetuous one -- "rebuked" him. Mark doesn't tell what Peter said, but we can surmise that it was something like, "We have

seen what power you have and thought you would free us from the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel to its previous glory." Jesus responded that such an

opinion is a “human” way of thinking. It’s what we all would have thought had we been among those first disciples.

Jesus not only rebukes Peter, but then shocks them even more deeply by telling them that his way of the cross may well be their future too. Those who would follow him will “deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.” As if that’s not enough, Jesus continues with even more unexpected and totally unforeseen news: To save your life you must lose it. You may lose your lives for Jesus sake. It was Jesus’ way of helping them begin to understand that “my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.” It was a bitter pill for the disciples to swallow! But it was necessary that they understand, otherwise they would miss the whole point of Jesus’ ministry, i.e., that he came to give his life for the salvation of them and us.

By our human nature we may want to be prosperous, strong, successful and influential. Jesus has other priorities. He, on the other hand, came to serve, not to be served. His ways are not our ways, yet he invites us to follow him and his ways.

The “theology of the cross” or “to deny oneself” does not mean a contrived kind of humility. We do not follow Jesus by demeaning ourselves. We are called upon to do the very best we can with the talents and abilities God has given us. To “deny oneself” means to keep one’s priorities in harmony with what Jesus told us in the two “great commandments” -- love God and love your neighbor (Mark 12:28-31)

We all reaffirm our baptismal covenant when we witness a baptism. We vow to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, and to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. In addition we promised to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

I tend to see a part of Sunday worship as the locker room chat by the coaches and players who remind us that we are a “service oriented”

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church that offers opportunities, encouragement, inspiration, and motivation to do what we promised to do in the field of the Lord.

Two weeks ago as I was leaving Messenger House after our Devotions service, a CNA chased after me and caught me outside the door. She asked if I could come

back as Lillian, one of the residents wanted to tell me something. I had a lot of tasks lined up after devotions and I was already late but I went back to see what she wanted. I pulled a chair up next to her wheel chair and she said immediately “thank you Pastor Dan for coming back I wanted to tell you something I know you would want to know. I am having a really good day today”. We all need to be able to celebrate our blessings even if it is for one good day. Lillian has no family or visitors and she always lights up when our crew from St. Barnabas shows up. Our ten ministers, eight from St Barnabas and two from Rolling Bay Press sit with the residents and practice ministry of presence, just being with them at their side. maybe holding their hand and listening to how they are doing. Some can’t speak so just the act of being there is so appreciated. If you feel called to this kind of ministry come and see.

In this season of Lent, we journey inward to examine what is keeping us from following Jesus’ way. I believe our duty in life is to make a difference; to make a difference to each other. That’s how God actually enters this world: through how we love each other as our spiritual vocation. Imagine how your own skills are the ones most needed in a world with so many problems. In addition we can always learn from those who serve us like I did with the Wrapper and the Tailor.

Jesus gives us hope for the future, we are called upon to follow him not just for this future, but in this life. To follow him now means a life more abundant. Following Jesus isn’t easy, it is just worth it.