

Jeremiah 11:1-20
Psalm 54
James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a
Mark 9:30-37

Sermon September 19th, 2021

The Disciples Talk Status. Jesus Talks Hospitality!

When I worked at Save on Foods many years ago, my boss and I were really close. I worked really hard on his crew, and so, he tried to give me hours wherever possible, since I wasn't full-time. I remember one week, he tried to give me more hours than another employee. But got push back, because this other employee had worked for the company longer than me. So, he had to give those hours to this other employee. Even though, according to my boss, I was a more productive worker.

And of course, I was working hard over the summer months to help pay for some of those steep school bills I received while I was attending university. Any extra hours my boss was able to give me helped along the way.

Well, this was the first time in my adult life where my worldview was challenged. I was close to my boss. Did everything he expected out of me and more, and because of a technicality, I was denied access to hours. I couldn't help but think I was being treated unfairly.

If one works hard, they are supposed to be rewarded? Right? This is the message that I learned growing up.

A good education. A good job. A hard work ethic. Money in the bank (**Image**). This formula is supposed to lead to us having a high status in society.

And the more status we have in our society the more access we have to the things we want and need.

This is generally how our world works. Status is a driving force in how we treat one another. Status is a driving force in some of the decisions we make.

The vehicle we choose (**Image**). The house we purchase. The career we go into. The amount and type of education we get.

Now of course, I have realized when working with a diversity of people over the years that status isn't something we always earn or lose on our own merit. Sometimes status is given to us or not given to us, because of where we come from or what gender we identify with (**Image**) or what age bracket we fit into.

But as I said above, status is a driving force in how we treat one another, and in some of our key decision making.

This is why I struggled so much with my boss' decision.

As we see in our gospel, striving for a higher status isn't a new idea. For the disciples, they too, are wondering how choosing to follow Jesus will impact their status. When Jesus came to call them to follow him, they were working for their family fishing company or in Matthew's case, as a tax collector. Both professions didn't do much to boost one's status. In fact, Matthew would have been seen as a traitor to his people. Tax collectors often were associated with the Roman Empire. The same Empire that was oppressing Matthew's community. And those who fished the waters on the sea of Galilee would have been seen as part of the peasantry class.

They grew up in very low status positions in society. But their luck is changing. They are now close friends with the future king. The Son of God. This relationship they have with Jesus has to boost their status to unprecedented levels. Right?

In fact, they won't be satisfied until they figure out who will have the greatest status among their inner group.

Well, like my experience at Save on Foods, the disciples are in for a rude awakening.

Their loyalty. Their hard work. Isn't going to raise their status in society. In fact, Jesus, their king, is encouraging them to live as if their status is the lowest in society. Just when they thought they were near the bottom of the status pit. They are invited to dig deeper (**Image**).

The first will be last and the last will be first.

The Kingdom of God doesn't work in the same way that our society does. According to Jesus, our obsession with status can interfere with our call to hospitality.

Our obsession with status leads to cliques. Divisions. Exalted attitudes. Our obsession with status makes some people lower than other people in our society. This leads those of us with higher status to sometimes marginalize those groups of people with little to no status. Our obsession with status creates barriers that prevent some people from being able to access basic needs. Our obsession with status challenges our ability to be hospitable to others.

For Jesus, hospitality is at the center of God's kingdom. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor. It doesn't matter what your race or ethnicity is. It doesn't matter what Gender you identify as or who you fall in love with. It doesn't matter if you have a lot of grey hair or are a baby getting ready to take your first steps (**Image**). It doesn't matter how close you are to Jesus or that you do so much more than the person next to you. All that matters to Jesus is that you know you are valued, and that you are called to the same servanthood as everyone else. We all stand on equal ground before Jesus.

Today, Michael received the waters of baptism. Today, Michael, a baby, one of the most vulnerable people in our community. Someone with little to no status in our society. Received the invitation to come to the font (Image) with the help of his parents, and older brother. To be welcomed into our community. To be welcomed into God's community. To be welcomed as a person who stands on equal ground with the rest of us. To be welcomed as a person who has been given the call of servanthood like the rest of us. To be welcomed as a person who has been declared in front of this assembly a child of God like the rest of us.

In our gospel, Jesus is inviting us as the church to be a community where we focus on being hospitable to others. Where we leave our status behind, and reflect the servanthood that Jesus reflects throughout this ministry. Where everyone stands on equal ground when they walk through those doors. Or when they turn on the tv/computer and tune in to our YouTube channel.

Let us pray, loving God, thank you for showing us hospitality. For welcoming us into your society. Help us reflect this same hospitality to others. **Amen.**

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