

This is the story of a woman who taught first grade. She had a class of twenty-five adorable 6yr olds. One day the teacher gave each child the first half of a well-known proverb and asked them to say in the remainder of the proverb. I'll tell you the first half of the proverb and you can fill the commonly known second half. Then I'll tell you what the 6 year olds said. (And I have to say in some cases, it is hard to believe that these are first graders, just 6 years olds.)

No news is.....impossible.  
Love all, trust..... me.  
An idle mind is.....the best way to relax.  
Strike while the.....bug is close.  
Better late than.....pregnant.  
A penny saved is..... not much.  
Don't change horses.....until they stop running.  
Don't bite the hand that..... looks dirty.  
There are none so blind as ..... Stevie Wonder.  
Where there's smoke there's ..... pollution.  
If at first you don't succeed..... get new batteries.  
Don't put off until tomorrow what..... you put on to go to bed.  
Never underestimate the power of ..... termites.

Proverbs ... almost every culture has them. And our Bible is full of them, especially in the 31 chapters that make up the book of that name... Proverbs.

I decided to try my hand at coming up with a definition of a proverb, and of course, because I'm never short on words, it is rather lengthy: A proverb is a pithy saying aimed at providing truth, wisdom and guidance for building upright character, making good choices, and living justly in communion with God and other people. So then I looked around for a definition of a proverb and of course, it wasn't hard to find one shorter than mine: a proverb is the wit of one and the wisdom of many.

Whatever the case, when you take the time to study the Book of Proverbs as found in the Bible, you will see that humility is one of the chief character virtues that is prized. Humility helps us know our place in relationship with God. You will remember some of those Proverbs like "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom." And fear of course, means respect laced with humility and awe. Humility helps us know our place in relationship with other people. Humility is always cultivated in relation to God and to other people. And that's where today's little Proverb comes in.

This is not just advice for navigating life in the royal court. The ancient world was strongly hierarchical. There was a place on the ladder for each and every person. You were supposed to know your place. You couldn't move up unless invited in some way. It was better to play it safe and be shifted up a notch than the reverse. If you did move up uninvited, you risked being demoted, which was more than just embarrassing. You were

losing face. Now losing face may be easily shrugged off by us, but in Jesus' time, losing face was almost like losing one's lie.

As you can see from today's readings, one context in which these rules applied was at dinner or at a banquet. How you treat others at the table reveals something about your character and how you view God and others. This is true for us today. How you treat people in traffic or in line at the store or in the midst of daily inconveniences reveals something about how you view others and how you view God. Character is lived out in ordinary, day-to-day experiences. Yet, at the same time, there is a sacredness to ordinary encounters. Ordinary encounters give us opportunities to exercise fear of the Lord (that is respect laced with humility and awe toward God). Ordinary encounters present opportunities to exercise wisdom, and humility, to love our neighbor as ourselves and to experience the presence of God.

Thursday morning, I spent a little bit of time down at Wisner Market with our Knitting4Peace group. They had a lovely table set up under a pop up canopy. On the table was literature about K4P as well as a sign up sheet in case people want to be on our mailing list or to come to the group. The table was also covered with items that the group had made – scarves, hats, mittens; baby blankets, shawls and sleeping mats; and of course the favorite of people of all ages – teddy bears and peace pals.

One of the visitors that morning was a young girl, maybe 11 or 12 years old. She was drawn to the teddy bears. She wanted to buy one in particular, but of course, the group does not sell anything that they make. All handmade items are donated to people in need. I took some time to describe where some of the donations go to the girl – and I really zeroed in our recent donations to people in Puerto Rico, thinking that because Dorian had just passed by the island, and because many of the items that were on the table were exactly like what we had sent to Puerto Rico. And I told her about how the kids had lost everything and therefore how valuable a toy a teddy bear or peace pal was. At that point, it was amazing what she did. She started to lay her hands on the peace pals, the teddy bears and more and keep saying, “I send them with a hug, a hug.” And then she'd add, “a blessing.” She kept this up and said, “I send them with a hug and a prayer.”

C. S. Lewis has said “Humility is not thinking less of yourself – it is thinking of yourself less.” That girl who took the initiative to bless those items was giving us a beautiful display of that kind of humility.

The thing of it is, Jesus doesn't just leave the wisdom of the proverb and of his parable there. He ups the ante. He says, “Let's change roles and assume now that you are giving the banquet. When you give the banquet, don't invite the usual people – the people who invite you and whom you reciprocate by inviting back. Think about who is missing from your tables. Take a second look and look for the people you tend to overlook ... the people that you value less ... the ones who might make you feel uncomfortable.”

Author and Pastor Tony Campolo tells a story of an experience at dinner in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, some years ago. "He was checking on mission programs that his organization carries out day in and day out in Haiti. He wanted to see how the workers were surviving emotionally and spiritually. At the end of a long day, he was tired and "peopled out," so it was with great relief that he sat down to eat a good dinner at a French restaurant in the heart of Port-au-Prince. He was seated next to the window so he could enjoy watching the activity on the street outside.

The waiter brought a delicious looking meal and set it in front of him. Tony picked up his knife and fork and was about to dive in when he happened to look to his right. There, with their noses pressed flat against the window, staring at his food, were four children from the streets. They pressed their faces right up against the glass; they were staring at his plate of food. The waiter, seeing his discomfort, quickly moved in and pulled down the window shade, shutting out the disturbing sight of the hungry children. The waiter then said to Tony, "Don't let them bother you. Enjoy your meal."

I appreciate Campolo's story because, given Jesus' push for us to invite the "poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind," the ones we might over look, it causes me to ask, "For whom are we pulling the shades down?" Who are the ones we turn our eyes from?... the ones we don't bother with? Are we pulling the shades down on people who don't have a lot of money? the ones who look and act very differently from us? Are we pulling the shades down on people of color? women? children? those whose relationships don't look like ours? the sick or dying? the ones whose political viewpoints we disagree with? who have differing physical or mental abilities? Are we, as a nation, pulling the shades down on immigrants and refugees and on the victims of gun violence?

Jesus is inviting us to push the shades up. For whom might we push the shades up? And how might we advocate for pushing the shades up? Today we enjoy table fellowship with Jesus and one another in the Sacrament of Holy Communion? Who could we invite to be at the table with us? Can you picture someone in your mind right now? What will it be like to chat with them?

You know that National Back to Church Sunday is in two weeks. It's a great time to invite people to pull the shades up and invite someone to worship with you. I ask you to prayerfully consider those whom you will invite.

One final proverb about humility: I've seen this proverb in a few different forms. So here's one: "the rivers and streams lead the 100 little streams and creeks because they stay low." Here's another version: "All streams flow to the sea because the sea is lower than they are." And one final version: the best are like water – good at benefitting all things without competing or gaining." Whatever version you like best, take it and run with it. For as Jesse Jackson says, "Never look down on anybody unless you are lifting them up." You gotta get down low to lift up others.