

## Etiquette and Evangelism, the two E's of discipleship

Luke 10:1-10

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July 8, 2007

In today's passage we have Jesus teaching a crash course in manners and mission to his seventy appointed disciples—seventy, probably to match the number of elders that Moses appointed during his wilderness wanderings. Does it surprise you as it surprised me that besides teaching his disciples theology and how to do mission, Jesus also had to teach his disciples basic etiquette? Poor Jesus! Makes sense, though. Jesus' first twelve disciples, anyway, worked with their hands. They spent their days sweating in the sun and their nights recovering from the physical labor of the day. Probably the seventy were of the same ilk. That means that they stayed home evenings, resting their weary bones. They did not often frequent dinner parties and go on overnight stays where table etiquette and social mores would be expected. Jesus was aware, though, that these socially challenged seventy would be visiting with people of various professions and social strata. They would be living in the homes of and breaking bread with both prostitutes and princes, both robbers and rulers, and both sinners and centurions. They needed to learn some social graces.

Jesus doesn't go into the more detailed nuances of etiquette. For instance, he doesn't tell the disciples which fork to use with the salad or how **not** to slurp your soup. No, Jesus deals with the basics. The basics that Jesus teaches, are typically taught to **children** when they are in kindergarten. Again, I say, poor Jesus! Jesus reminds his newly appointed disciples:

- 1) Be gracious to your hosts. "That means, do not go around town looking for the best offer in housing. It is not good form to change hosts from day to day depending on which potential host has the bigger house or the more slaves"
- 2) Say "'Peace to this house' when you enter the home of stranger." My New Interpreter's Bible tells me that this was a common greeting—like our own, "How do you do," or "A pleasure to meet you." Finally,
- 3) Jesus says, "Accept the food that is offered to you with gratitude and appreciation." Jesus gives this instruction twice, which means he was **really** concerned that the disciples not mess up on this one.

In my previous church, I led youth mission trips. On one of these trips for one week, we lived in a church basement fellowship hall, with an adjoining kitchen—That set up was ideal for us, since we prepared our own breakfasts and lunches. Two large precooked hams had been donated to us for our mission trip by the Honey Baked Ham Company. The precooked hams came in handy. We cooked Ham and eggs for breakfast, and made ourselves ham sandwiches for lunch. Sounds delicious, right?

Our dinners were prepared by local churches. Those churches, mostly smallish and hidden away down windy country roads, showed us the kind of hospitality which we can hope was enjoyed at least on occasion by Jesus' seventy disciples. The first night, we ate dinner at a Mennonite Church. The members were generous to a fault, and we enjoyed our meal, even though our main course was ham. By that time we had already eaten honey baked ham for both breakfast and lunch. The next night, the little white Methodist church, just down the road from the Mennonite church served us—ham. Wednesday night we ate at the Presbyterian Church. You got it, ham again. On Thursday night, those of us in my van, which was the lead van in a caravan of vans headed to a Baptist church, told ham jokes all the way to dinner.

The Baptists had outdone themselves in hospitality. Church members greeted us at the door. We were escorted to their fellowship hall, where instead of a buffet type meal, the members actually served us at table. I sat at one end of a longish table, a boy in our youth group, Andrew, sat at the other end. He was the first to be served. Now here I should pause to add that Andrew comes from a good family. I know his parents. I am sure that they taught him the kind of etiquette of which we are speaking. Still, when he looked down at the food on his plate, he could not help but exclaim loudly: "Oh, no, not---I was a cocked and ready rubber band. I knew what was coming. Up and out of my seat, to the other end of the table I shot, grabbed a biscuit from his plate, and stuffed it into a surprised Andrew's mouth, all before he could utter the word --"ham."

Jesus says, "Even when you are served ham, breakfast lunch and dinner, four straight days, accept what has been offered to you, *gratefully*."

Jesus offered rules of etiquette to the chosen seventy who may have needed some reminding. But Jesus also offered rules concerning how they were to evangelize in the communities they visited. Evangelism. The word has a negative ring to it in a way that etiquette does not. Evangelism It sometimes and for some people conjures up visions of religious folk who, wearing their churchiest attire—knock on doors and ply people with literature having to do with the end of the world.

We could call it something else, like outreach, but we might as well try to make friends with the word, since it is, after all, Biblical. Evangelism. It is the act of proclaiming the good news. Jesus instructs the newly appointed disciples to proclaim the good news that the kingdom has come near by:

- 1) Serving
- 2) Telling

To Jesus' mind, apparently, both of these kinds of evangelism stand together. And note that Jesus has put them in a specific order. It's not, tell them that the kingdom of God is near and if they believe you, THEN serve them. There's no coercion--no carrot and no stick. Neither is it, serve the communities you visit, but keep your mouth shut." It's simply: 1) Serving 2) Telling.

Did I say simply? Because of course it is not. Serving is fine. It means giving of yourself, and often, your money, too. You know and I know that you get really good feelings when you serve. It's a kind of natural high. But **telling** people about your faith? That's just not done. You don't say things like "the kingdom of God is near," to people you hardly know or even to people you know very well. It's like telling off-color jokes at a funeral, or wearing a long white dress to someone else's wedding.

What would it be like—say, going to visit someone at the hospital and then, just as you are about to leave, offering a "By the way, I just want you to know that the kingdom of God has come near." Or, imagine helping someone push his car that has died to the nearest gas station—as I did a few weeks' ago. What if, when the car owner shook my hand and offered a thank you, I had answered back: "The kingdom of God has come near?" What if you were to give up your seat to an elderly person in a crowded doctor's office waiting room?. What if in so doing you were to offer, for the whole room of waiting patients to hear, "The kingdom of God has come near."

I'm thinking that some people would assume you belong to that group of church people we mentioned earlier—the ones who want to tell you about how the end of the world is only a heart beat away.. Or people might think you are a terrorist.

On the other hand, you know as I know that it's good to let people in on the joy that we have, knowing that God is with us, that we do the things that we do, because God loves us and we want to share the good news of that love. We know it's good to do that because Jesus tells us so. We know it's good to do that because we've read about how faith and the good vibes it brings, are an antidote to at least some forms of depression. But most of all, we know it's good to do that because someone once shared the news of

God's love for us, with us, and changed our lives for the better. Keeping all that faith to yourself is like having a birthday cake and then telling your birthday party guests that "nanny, nanny poo, poo" --they aren't going to get any.

We've been talking about etiquette and evangelism. You know it occurs to me that they are really polar opposites. Etiquette, after all, is about fitting in. We would all slurp our soup, wouldn't we, if it weren't for the fact that others might stop eating and stare at us, annoyed by the sound of our slurping? Evangelism, on the other hand, is about standing out. You tell a roomful of patients in a doctor's waiting room that "The kingdom of God has come near," and you **absolutely** are going to draw attention to yourself.

Did Jesus understand human nature well enough to know that fitting in was so very important to us? Maybe that is why he puts etiquette and evangelism together in his list of instructions to the seventy--The fitting in and the standing out were meant to balance each other. Jesus says, "Yes, you will be drawing attention to yourselves when you evangelize, but only just a little, since you also will be following the rules of etiquette I have given you."

In fact, perhaps Jesus **so** understood the seventy's fears of standing out, that is why he instructs them to travel in pairs. If you are going to have to stand out in a crowd, it's far better to have a support group after all—even if it's a support group of one.

That thought brings us to the here and now.

Cove Church. As a church we are called to practice at least basic social graces—being gracious to hosts, saying hello with a handshake and a smile, accepting what is offered to us in good faith. As a church we are also called to evangelize—which includes both serving **and** telling. **Serving** is ok, but we are absolutely **loathe**, to tell the good news that God's kingdom has come near. Loathe, I'm not sure I've ever used that word before, ever, but isn't it a great one? Loathe. It's almost onomatopoeia, don't you think. We **loathe** to tell the good news because, like the seventy, we do not choose to be that conspicuous.

But guess what? Just as the seventy had a support group, so too, we have a support group. That support group is us. Look around this sanctuary. These are the people who have pledged their love to you, and to whom you have pledged your love in return—**no matter what**. Yes, even when you evangelize—maybe even especially when you evangelize. Because even though we, individually, do not like to be the one doing it, we know, deep in our hearts, that it is important work.

The truth is, we who are members of Cove Church can dance on tables, wear lampshades on our heads, run the roads of Covesville and North Garden naked, and yes, we can even **evangelize**. We can do all sorts of things out there, because we have each other in here. That, too, is what it means to have the kingdom of God draw near.

And it has. Believe it. It is true. Amen