

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY - C - JULY 24, 2016

A LITTLE OVER FOUR YEARS AGO I WAS IN JERUSALEM FOR A

EXCELLENT BIBLICAL PROGRAM - A SABBATICAL.....

I LEARNED MANY THINGS BUT ONE THING I NEVER LEARNED HOW TO DO

WAS HAGGLE WITH THE MERCHANTS WHEN IT CAME TO PURCHASING

ANYTHING....

I WAS TERRIBLE....I WOULD HAGGLE ONLY HALF-HEARTEDLY....

ALMOST ALWAYS AGREEING AFTER ONLY A BRIEF INTERCHANGE....

*I HARDLY EVER RECALL SEEING A PRICE POSTED FOR ANY PRODUCT,
FOOD ETC.....*

THE CLOSEST THING WE HAVE TO IT HERE IN THE US IS THE PURCHASE

OF AN AUTOMOBILE.....

I'VE DONE THAT A FEW TIMES WITH THE SAME POOR RESULTS....

BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE HAVE IN A FIRST READING, ISN'T IT?

AND ABRAHAM IS VERY GOOD AT IT ISN'T HE? HE EVENTUALLY, GETS

GOD TO AGREE THAT HE WILL SPARE SODOM AND GOMORRAH IF HE

FINDS ONLY TEN INNOCENT PEOPLE....AFTER BEGINNING WITH FIFTY

OF COURSE, HE WAS NOT ABLE TO FIND EVEN TEN....

HOWEVER, AS ANY WORTHWHILE SCRIPTURE SCHOLAR WOULD TELL YOU

- WE ARE NOT TO TAKE THIS STORY LITERALLY.....

THE PURPOSE OF THE STORY IS NOT TO DEMONSTRATE ABRAHAM'S

ABILITY TO BARGAIN BUT TO SHOW HIS UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP WITH

GOD.....

THE PURPOSE OF THE STORY IS TO TELL US THAT GOD IS SOMEONE YOU

CAN BARGAIN WITH - YOU CAN RELATE TO -

THERE CAN BE SOME GIVE AND TAKE

THE RELATIONSHIP IS NOT SET IN STONE.....

YOU CAN NEGOTIATE, AS IT WERE - OF COURSE, AS LONG AS YOU'VE

MADE A COMMITMENT IN GOOD FAITH TO THE RELATIONSHIP,

IN OTHER WORDS YOU'VE GIVEN YOURSELF OVER TO GOD AND THE

RELATIONSHIP FULLY -

LIKE RELATING TO YOUR SPOUSE - YOUR PARENT - YOUR CHILD

THE COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP IS A GIVEN - YOU NEGOTIATE WITHIN

THAT - THE RELATIONSHIP IS NOT NEGOTIABLE -

I AM HUMAN AND YOU ARE GOD - MY CREATOR - MY DIVINE SOURCE

IN THAT SENSE, THE PURPOSE OF THE STORY AND OUR GOSPEL ALSO, IS

TO REMIND US THAT WE CAN HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR CREATOR

WE CAN COMMUNICATE WITH OUR CREATOR....WE CAN HAVE A

CONVERSATION - A DIALOG

NOW COMMUNICATING WITH, HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR GOD

IS IN MANY WAYS MUCH LIKE OTHER RELATIONSHIPS IN OUR LIVES....

AND WE HAVE DEGREES OF INTIMACY IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS DON'T WE?

C.S. LEWIS ONCE OBSERVED THAT THERE ARE THREE LEVELS OF INTIMACY.....

THE FIRST, WE LEARN WORDS FROM SOMEONE ELSE IN ORDER TO SPEAK

TO THE LOVED ONE....

IN THIS EARLY STAGE OF LOVE, WE DEPEND ON A GREETING CARD OR

THE WORDS BORROWED FROM A FRIEND'S ADVICE.....

*AS LOVE MATURES, WE BEGIN TO SPEAK OUR OWN WORDS TO THE HEART
OF THE BELOVED.....*

*THE FINAL STAGE, LEWIS SAYS, IS THE POINT WHERE LOVERS DO NOT
ALWAYS HAVE TO SPEAK WORDS....*

*THE LOVERS CAN COMMUNICATE INTIMACY TOO DEEP FOR WORDS -
THERE IS UNSPOKEN KNOWLEDGE AND TRUST*

*AND LEWIS SUGGESTS THAT PRAYER MATURES ALONG THESE SAME
THREE LEVELS OF INTIMACY....*

WHEN WE FIRST LEARN TO PRAY, WE LEARN A SET OF WORDS....

FOR EXAMPLE, THE LORD'S PRAYER WE HEAR IN THE GOSPEL TODAY....

CERTAINLY A MODEL PRAYER FOR US

*OR WE MIGHT LEARN A MORE CONTEMPORARY PRAYER LIKE THAT OF
REINHOLD NIEBUHR ADOPTED BY AA:*

*"LORD, GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT
CHANGE, COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN, AND THE WISDOM TO
KNOW THE DIFFERENCE."*

BUT THE NEXT LEVEL OF INTIMACY IS TO LEARN OUR OWN WORDS IN

PRAYER....TO SPEAK PERSONALLY, HEART TO HEART

*FINALLY, IF WE ARE PERSISTENT AND CONSISTENT WE CAN EXPERIENCE
CLOSE COMMUNION WITH OUR GOD AT TIMES AND NOT NEED WORDS....*

*ARE RITUALS AND WORDS OF PRAYER - LIKE THE OUR FATHER AND THE
HAIL MARY STILL IMPORTANT?*

ABSOLUTELY....BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBDER THAT WORDS -

***EVEN THE LORD'S PRAYER - ARE WORDS MEANT TO DEEPEN OUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.....***

THEY ARE THE ROAD - NOT THE DESTINATION

***AND AS WE HEAR IN OUR GOSPEL STORY TODAY - PERSISTENCE,
FAITHFULNESS IS ALL IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF PRAYER.....***

AS IT IS IN OUR OTHER RELATIONSHIPS ALSO....

A GOOD OHIO STATE BUCKEYE FOOTBALL FAN KNOWS THAT VERY WELL

THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF PERSISTENCE IN A RELATIONSHIP

BECAUSE THEY READ IN YESTERDAY'S SPORT SECTION THAT CHASE

YOUNG, A 6 FOOT 5, 235 LB, A FOUR STAR DEFENSIVE END FROM

HYATTSVILLE, MD COMMITTED TO PLAY AT OHIO STATE IN 2017...

YOUNG SAID THAT HE FELT THAT THE BUKEYES WANTED HIM MORE

THAN ANY OTHER PROGRAM....

AND FIRST OFFERED HIM IN SEPTEMBER 2015 AND WERE PERSISTENT

***HE WAS RANKED NO. 3 NATIONALLY AND HAD ABOUT 40 SCHLARSCHIP
OFFERS***

"IT'S ABOUT WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME, HE SAID, BUT IT DOES MAKE ME

FEEL LIKE THEY WANT ME A LOT"

A VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION -:

FOR ME - DOES MY GOD FEEL WANTED A LOT BY ME?

FOR YOU - DOES YOUR GOD FEEL WANTED A LOT BY YOU?

***LISTEN CAREFULLY TO WHAT JESUS PROMISES IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL
AND PERSISTENT.....***

IT WON'T BE A LOT OF STUFF - RATHER "...THE FATHER IN HEAVEN

WILL GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM."

LUKE, MORE THAN ANY OTHER EVANGELIST IS CONVINCED THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN FOLLOWING CHRIST....

IN HIS MIND, HOW WOULD WE KNOW HOW TO CARRY ON AS JESUS' DISCIPLES WITHOUT THE SPIRIT POINTING US IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

WHEN LUKE WROTE HIS GOSPEL IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE FIRST CENTURY, THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, FOLLOWING THE HISTORICAL JESUS MINDSET, HAD NOT YET DEVELOPED A HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE.

IT FUNCTIONED AS THE BODY OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF ITS DEEP RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE RISEN JESUS AND WITH ONE ANOTHER - NOT BECAUSE OF ANY HIERARCHICAL PREROGATIVES. AS PAUL ONCE REMINDED HIS CORINTHIAN COMMUNITY - THE SPIRIT NOT ONLY GIFTS EACH MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY WITH ALL THE TALENTS THE COMMUNITY NEEDS IT ALSO HELPS THEM INTEGRATE THOSE GIFTS FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY...

LET US PRAY IN THIS EUCHARIST FOR THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - THE VERY SPIRIT OF CHRIST JESUS - AND ALL THE GIFTS THAT ACCOMPANY THAT SPIRIT...FOR US AS INDIVIDUALS AND FOR OUR COMMUNITIES...