

Our Place at His Place

Boldly Vulnerable

August 2, 2020

Welcome to where we're learning to be *honest with ourselves and authentic with others!*



Last Sunday, I pictured the world as a ship, cruising through the darkness. And we all choose our role: **oblivious passenger**, or **hectic crew**, or **courageous captain**; like the Captain of our salvation, as Hebrews (2:10) calls Him. So, **which are you: captain, passenger, or crew?**

If you complain about going somewhere and no one greeting *you*, you've chosen "passenger". If you're always griping about being too busy and not appreciated, you've chosen "crew". Be the captain. **Take control and be the one to encourage, strengthen, and comfort**, like *our servant-leader*. **Strive for sincerity, not superiority**. Be willing to sacrifice self – to go down with the ship if need be – to care for those who are on this journey with you.



With that in mind: **how often do you offer the encouragement you desire?** And, on the flip side, **how often do you offer the judgment you despise?** And maybe even more to the point: **Are you more captain-like with pets or people?** Why do you suppose that is? Well, you *know* they need you, accept you, and don't *judge* you ... *accept cats*. I hate being judged!



We *fear* being judged. I went to Hawaii about 25 pounds ago. And I bought a bottle of water. On an impulse, I spent \$1 more because I liked the blue bottle. It was *only* a dollar; and it felt like a vacation thing. But, when I went to pay, the lady at the register says, "Why you buyin' the *expensive* water?" I smiled, "I just like it." Grumpy says, "You *know* it's all the same." "I know." She looks at it and goes, "Well ... okay then."



As I left I realized I was telling myself I'm *never* shopping *there* again. Why? Because, that's *all* it takes! It isn't petty; it's *fear*. **Fear of disapproval and rejection and judgment**. We *so* fear rejection that we often won't even attempt to make the connections *we* so desperately desire. In her own way she was probably looking out for me. So I told myself, I'm gonna buy that water again, put it on the counter and say, "It's ritzy *water* guy. Ring me up!" Thought I might even slide her a nickel and say, "Here's a little *something* for you." I didn't. Fear.



Unlike our pets, **people make us feel unnecessary, undesirable, unacceptable, and unworthy**. Why do you suppose *they* do that? They don't mean to, mind you. Just as *you* don't mean to make *them* feel that way. But, you *do*. How else could we *all* feel this way about *them* – unless, we're all *part* of *them*? So, **why do you suppose you do that?**

We don't mean to, mind you, *most the time*; it's just that **we mostly don't mean *not to***. That takes work. Effort. Spiritual growth. Ongoing grace. And, **an inclination, if not enthusiasm, to boldly bare your soul** to mammals much more critical than *cats!*

Put on then, **[on behalf of our Captain]** as God's *chosen* ones, holy and *beloved*, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you ... And let the *peace* of Christ *rule* in your hearts, – Colossians 3:12-15 ESV

Only the assurance of “the peace of [the love of] Christ” can rule over our anxious impulse to *pretend* to be more or less than we really are. And **if we won't admit *who we are*, we stay stuck *where we are***. But when “the peace of the love of Christ” *rules* us, **it empowers us with courage to be seen *as we are***, out of compassion for those who are still afraid. Let's be real; **if you're not real, you're not helping anyone**. I'm *Ritzy Water Guy! Judge away!* There's *peace* in my heart.



Oh, and I got my chest waxed. Judge away. So, after building up the nerve to make an appointment, I'm sitting alone, in this tiny little waiting room, on one of two chairs, at *Screamin' Eve's* in Bellingham, when another customer, a woman, a bit older, enters, avoids eye contact, and sits down in silence ... three *inches* from me.

No acknowledgment. Not even a nod or a glance. After a couple *long* minutes the awkwardness is killing me. So, I turn to her and say, “My wife and I are going to Hawaii, and I'm having the grey hair waxed off my chest.” Too which *she* replies: “I have a mustache.” Nothing more said. No need. We connected. Related. **Encouraged. Strengthened. Comforted.** We were like soul siblings. Now, you *know* she's there because this mustache (which I could *barely* see, even up close) was embarrassing to *her*. And yet, she was *happy* – *relieved* even – to point it out to *me*. Why *is* that? Well, **when you open up to *them*, they open up to *you***. If you feel like you've never felt accept-*ed*, you're probably not perceived as accept-*ing*. Don't be a passenger. Be the captain.

Don't play the *rejection game* this week – no such thing as a *victim* in Christ – **play the *boldly vulnerable game***. Nod and say “Hi” to strangers. If they respond in a positive way, you score *nothing*. But, if they ignore you, you score *one*. And if they respond in a *negative* way, you score *ten*. They're passengers, let 'em be. Each day try to beat your high score! And, when scoring points is more satisfying than pouting, welcome aboard [salute] captain. Where do you want to take this ship? **The *rejection game* keeps us focused on our fears** – the vulnerability game empowers us to face and overcome the fear with the power of love. Remember, **how we *act* in a given situation governs what God can do in it**.



Okay, Hawaii hotel. Cramped elevator. Doors open. Man steps out. Steps back. Wrong floor. Doors close. Elevator music. Without looking at him, I said, “I followed a guy onto the wrong floor. Turned back as the doors shut. Felt like an idiot.” He says, “I just did that a minute ago.” A woman says, “Me too.” We could've made T-shirts; we were a club! **People long to belong.**

They just need a captain. We're told about the God-shaped hole in every heart that's only filled by Christ. So true. But did you know that everyone also has a human-shaped hole in their heart? It can only be filled by Christlikeness. And, **we can only close it up by opening up**. Vulnerability is *not* weakness! **Vulnerability is the courageous display of imperfections**. Brother James says:

Therefore *confess* your sins [faults and flaws and fears] to *each other* and pray for *each other* so that *you* may be *healed*. – James 5:16 NIV

The Lord has made so much of our own healing contingent upon our own compassion and care and openness to those around us. So, don't *just* show us your strengths, it makes you look *weak*. **It takes courage to admit fear, and strength to admit weakness**. We don't want to share faults and flaws and fears; but, when someone else does it, we think: we'll *that* took courage!

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, [whenever, wherever, and however it comes] because as *he* is so also are we *in* this world. There is no fear in love, but *perfect* [i.e. full grown; mature] love casts out fear. – 1 John 4:16-18 ESV

The world can only offer fear and shame, **because everything is based on you** and what *you* can do and what *you* can offer, and *you know* that *you* are broken. But, God's kingdom of perfect love, drives out fear and shame. **Because it's not based on you!** It's based on *God*, who is *love*. And *His* love drives out *our* fear. So, **how often do you offer what you long for?**



I was at a Waikiki café, alone, having breakfast: golden-brown pancakes on a square white plate, with whipped butter, bacon, and coconut syrup. But, these were ... *perfect* pancakes. When I pressed 'em with my fork, they made air-bubbles! As I was eating, an odd but cheerful man in checkered pants hurried through the restaurant, saying "Hi" to each table as he passed by; he joked with the crew at the entrance, and left, laughing. I had a feeling *he* made those pancakes. Only joy could produce something like this. When I paid, I asked who made 'em. She said, "The guy that just left." The waiter behind her said, "The *weirdo*." I thought, "You mean, the *captain!*"

Well I found ol' checkered-pants a couple blocks away (because I hunted him down); I pointed toward the restaurant, and said, "Excuse me, you made the pancakes?" He apprehensively said, "Yes?" I said, "They're perfect!" And I shook his hand, said, "Thank you," handed him \$20, and left. He yells out, "Wow! You're welcome!" He *was* a little weird; but, who's judging?

You see, we can only be vulnerable to the degree that our identity, our sense of worth, is founded on God's love, and grounded in His Word, and *not* contingent on people's approval.

Long ago, I struggled believing *God* could care about *people*. We're so gross. Even though I cared about bums and bag-ladies – that's how we referred to the homeless back in the dark ages – I couldn't imagine, not just *allowing* but, *desiring* to have them move into *my* house. And from God's perspective, I have nothing more to offer and I'm certainly no more appealing.



And, I step on ants. And, the disparity between an ant and *me* is nothing compared to the disparity between me and *God*. So, wouldn't His greatness render us less appealing to Him than ants are to *us*? Well sure, you blow him up like *that*, he's cute as a button. David wrestled with this too.



When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him,
– Psalm 8:3-4 ESV



And, what I realized is that **it wasn't about the ants' insignificance, but my incapacity to care**. I mean, why do we swerve to miss a squirrel, and feel a bit heartsick if we hear a little *rumf-rump*? Because, **love intuitively acts to watch over weaker life-forms**; but only to a point for us finite, self-absorbed, little humans. It just didn't carry down to ants. Till I watched "A Bug's Life," because my perception of significance is so inconsistent. I'd *never* step on a ladybug. Why? Um ... 'cause it's got lady in its name; and, it's so cute?" Well sure, you blow her up like *that*, she's fairly hideous. And what's that *other* thing? How'd *he* get in the sermon? Run! She's gonna eat you!



Our problem is, **we think too small when it comes to the reach of the love of the Creator of everything**. He even tracks the sparrows! Seriously.

[Jesus said] Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **[Why on earth would He do that?!** **Because He can, and therefore does, to watch over us]** So don't be afraid; you are worth more than *many* sparrows. - Matthew 10:29-31 NIV



If you're thinking "How many?" your problem is deeper than one sermon can fix! Don't miss the point: **the greatness of God makes Him more likely to care for unlimited lower life forms**.

So, I'm in this hotel lobby with huge windows facing a city sidewalk. This is Seattle, not Hawaii. I'm writing, and I have on headphones for background music to drown out distractions. And a song comes on as I'm looking out, and it synchronizes with what I'm seeing. Weirdly so. When the song ended, I tried it again. And it did it again. And again. Here's the song.

A man running for a bus; a woman fighting an umbrella in the wind; a couple walking, holding hands; and, a mumbling bag-lady bum with a shopping cart. It was like they were being professionally scored. I realized I was subconsciously selecting what to focus on, based on what I knew the song would do. But, I was seeing *living* stories. And each time, I ended up choked up, by the deep beauty otherwise buried. Even the bag lady! Well sure, you blow her up like *that*, *anybody* can see it. I've heard that music can't *make* us feel anything; it can only *enhance* what we already feel. Is so, and I think so, then deep down, I inherently value the lady-bum.

So, **take charge of this ship** as it sails through the darkness, **and consciously, fearlessly select what to focus on, based on what you know the song of the Lamb is gonna do!**