**Luke 11 1-13 24.7.22**

What is so important to you, that you would be willing to publicly shame yourself to get it?

This isn’t a question I’ve ever really thought of, before reflecting on this passage anyway. I’ve thought about the things I would do for others at the expense of myself or at personal cost to myself, but not really the things I would do that would purposefully make me feel embarrassed or ashamed. Because feeling shame is something that is uncomfortable, something that separates us from the people around us, and more importantly, can separate us from God. Shame makes us visibly squirm when we feel like we’re caught out or feel as if we’re being judged, and so we try to do everything we can to make sure that we don’t do anything that would bring about feelings of shame, public or self-imposed. Shame is the opposite of honour – you can behave honourably, or you can behave shamefully. And when we act with honour, we hold our heads high and know that we can face others and can face God. When we act shamefully, we may want to do neither of these things.

And so I ask again, what is so important to you, that you would be willing to publicly shame yourself to get it?

In the second half of our Gospel reading, Jesus tells a story, getting the disciples to imagine that they find themselves in the situations where a friend has arrived at night-time, midnight. This in itself wouldn’t have been that unusual, people often travelled at night when the temperature was cooler, something that we can appreciate all too well after the week we’ve had! And so, the disciples have this friend arrive and they realised that they have no food to offer them, no food to give their tired and hungry friends, they cannot offer hospitality as they should. This is a disgrace, a disaster, a humiliating situation to be in, because in not being able to offer hospitality to their guests they would bring shame upon not just them, but their entire family. You cannot possibly receive these guests if you aren’t able to offer them hospitality.

This is the situation the disciples are being asked to put themselves in. Imagine, says Jesus, you are about to bring shame upon yourself and your family because you have no food for your guests, what do you do?

Well, here we get to the start of Jesus’ story. You go to another friend, at midnight, and you tell them of your predicament. You ask them to lend you some bread, and you explain why, because a friend of yours has arrived and you have nothing to offer them. You become willing to act shamelessly in front of someone else, because this is less shaming than not feeding a sudden and unexpected midnight guest.

What is so important to you, that you would be willing to publicly shame yourself to get it? For Jesus and his disciples, *this* is the thing, this custom of hospitality and shame means that it is better to ask and ask and ask, shamelessly, than to not ask and be disgraced.

Why does Jesus tell this story, why does he give the disciples this example when they ask about prayer? Well, because this is also the answer to the disciples asking him to teach them to pray. “Lord, teach us to pray” they say, and in response Jesus tells them, “When you pray, say these words. And when you pray, pray these words as though your honour depended on it.”

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, what they got was a life changing prayer because it gives insight into a life changing relationship with God, a new relationship, a relationship that is parental and intimate and personal. They got a prayer that tells them to speak to God as if they know God, and God knows them, because this is, of course, true. They got a prayer that tells them to ask for what they need, and to ask daily, because their needs are important and because God will listen. They got a prayer that reminds them that they rely on God and need to live their lives God’s way, that we rely on God for the power and concept of forgiveness. They got a prayer that surprised them, and a story that told them to pray these words shamelessly, as if their honour depended on it.

Often the story Jesus tells after he teaches the disciples the Lord’s Prayer is talked about in terms of persistence. Keep on asking for what you need, and you’ll get it. Whilst persistence in prayer is important and worthwhile and is something Jesus himself says in his words of “Ask, seek, knock”, I don’t think it’s the main point for us to take away. Instead, I think it goes back to shame and honour; the disciples were told to imagine themselves into a situation where their willingness to ask repeatedly for what they needed was more important than looking good.

When we relate this to prayer, what we’re talking about is the humility to come to God with everything, because this prayer is both our everyday diet and the most important prayer we will ever pray. We are to ask God in prayer for what we need as if our honour depends on it, we are to pray shamelessly. Ask even if you'd rather not, bring everything to God in prayer, your needs, your wants, your shame, your gratitude, your everyday and your once in a lifetime, and pray earnestly as if nothing else matters, nothing else is more important at this moment than this prayer and this relationship. Be relentless in your prayers and in your pursuit of God, as God likewise is relentless in their desire for relationship with us.

Because Jesus taught his disciples, and us, to pray the intimate words of the Lord’s Prayer, we too have a close relationship with God the Father, on whom our every need is reliant and who knows and loves us deeply, and we pray these words daily as if our very honour depends on it, and because it is through prayer that our relationship with God is formed and maintained.

And so, let us pray now, with honour and humility, the Lord’s prayer all together: Our Father…Amen

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