

August 28, 2022

Pr. Steve

In the name of God, Abba-Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

'Christian life has not been tried and found wanting. It has been left untried and found difficult.'
So said G.K. Chesterton.

Jesus is invited to dinner on the Sabbath. (A little context--it was a tradition to have a Sabbath meal after going to Shabbat service, and if possible, invite a rabbi or a learned teacher to come over. And so it was a gathering like a symposium--[a] time of reflection for edifying conversation.)

And he notices the guests are going for the best seats. Now this is the guy who has said, *'You cannot serve God and greed.'* He said, *'Lend your money without any hope of return.'* (You remember that part, don't you?) He's the one who says, *'The first will be last, and the last, first.'* And now he says, *'Don't be greedy about sitting up front. You might want to take a seat in the back--to protect yourself from a little embarrassment.'*

This is not about table etiquette. This is about power, and how power plays, and the important game of rank and status, and who knows who. This is not petty, my friends, this is the Game of Life, and it's very serious, isn't it? You all know that.

Who do you know who's got connections, right? That's how it works. You get that good seat because you want to be with the insiders. *'I want to be with you influencers.'* That's our new name now. Right today you hear that on the news--'So and so is an influencer.' Oooh, you've got to get in touch with that person. It also brings you closer to corruption and exploitation, you know, it's much easier when you're in the inside. That's about power. Oh, and then he adds, *'And the next time you throw a party, be sure to invite the cripples and the lame, the deaf, and the blind, because they can't possibly repay you.'* ...God will notice.

Part of the story is that the crippled and lame were excluded from gatherings and inner circles, and in the Temple itself. They weren't allowed to be there because *the piety of the day said that the impurity of disfigured people interrupted the angels from praying.* Oh, they were so pious in those days. Can you believe that? What a crock!!

It's all about the powerful who are offended by the weak and the vulnerable because they're terrified of becoming weaker themselves, right? They are so afraid--*'We don't want to see them near us and remind us of what could happen.'* Aren't you glad you came to dinner?

Martin Luther King, in 1959, traveled to India. He wanted to see the land of Gandhi, and what had occurred since his assassination. He wanted to meet Untouchables. Now, you know, the caste system in India has four layers to it and in the bottom most layers they have the Untouchables. They don't matter; they don't exist; they aren't human. And for many decades previously,

Christians in India were considered Untouchables. They're just sort of invisible--they've left society. They're not part of reality in the caste system.

Well, while there he was invited to speak in Trivandrum, in the southern state of Kerala in India. (And of course, I've been there.)

At any rate, the host introduced him by saying '*And now, I would like to present a fellow Untouchable from the United States.*' King was shocked. He was angered. '*What are you talking about?! I've traveled all this distance to come here to be with you. I just had dinner with the Prime Minister. Why do you treat me like this?*' And then he realized, '*I am an Untouchable.* And back home, my 20 million brothers and sisters in that caste system are suffocating inside of airtight cages--because of abuse and oppression and poverty. And it is this which is underlying the whole thing, which I'm fighting all the time. It's not about race and color, it's about power, and how it's used against the least.'

The caste system is simply a hierarchy of values, by which we decide who's in, who's out--who matters, who doesn't? And who's on the bottom? We don't care as long as we're not one of them! It's pretty simple, don't you think? And the invisibility of this is what gives it such power. Except...we all understand the caste system in the places where we've worked, don't we? Who's on top, who's on bottom, how the game works--that's crystal clear to us--and if you can move or not, jockey for power, change things.

But we have this myth in America, you can do whatever you want. It's a free society--you can be president, you can own a corporation, you can go to the moon, and do whatever. And if you don't want to do it—

It's your fault, [Pat]! (She just doesn't care enough. She's not devoted.)

Where does that come from? It's ridiculous.

The caste system. It's assigning arbitrary values. Hmm, could be physical traits. Could be your ethnic origin. Could be your gender. The one thing we want to be clear about is 'Who's on the bottom', and making sure it's not us.

The design is pretty simple in our country:

There's the dominant caste, the ruling powers, the favored caste. Your skin color really doesn't matter. You can join that group as long as you don't break the caste rules.

Then there's the middle caste--Asian people, Latinos, Latinas.

The subordinate caste, African Americans.

And then the original caste, indigenous people. (They're somewhere, aren't they?)

Any questions? Any objections? Yeah, this is how it works. It's not about race. That's a delusion--all this 'skin color'. It's the power that has made this work for 400 years--twelve generations of oppression.

Here's another way of saying it.

Do you know that there are no black people in the continent of Africa? Not one. They're all human beings with history, traditions, families, culture, tribal relations.

Did you know there's no white people in Europe? None. There's only Scandinavians, and Croatians, and French, and.... They all have their tribal affiliations and histories.

It's when you come to America that you become white.

And when we begin to see through it, when we see the hideous delusions, and yet power, of the caste system, we start to see everything more clearly. And from that place, you can recognize there are no strangers.

Now, of course, all kinds of people are strange and different. Some of you are pretty strange...but when we make heart to heart connections, and become human with each other, sometimes we recognize we're in the presence of angels, which we had never seen before.

And we visit those in prison because they are part of us. And those who are treated badly--we practice kindness and compassion--because they are part of us.

And Jesus experienced all of this--he was a stranger; he was in prison; he was treated badly. Jesus was always eccentric. Ec=outside. Centric=the circle. He was outside the inner circle. Always.

So, treat everyone--high and low--as if they're Jesus, whose love, like the sunshine and the rain, falls on everyone equally.

Because Love is the need. Love makes a difference. And Love is everything.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.