

## SERMON: PRIVILEGE- AUG. 28, 2022

We all know that person, the one who enters a store and demands immediate service even if there are 10 other people waiting. Somehow, them getting their coffee is so much more important than anyone else's. Or the parent who puts up a fuss because their child isn't put on the field enough. I have even seen people raise a fuss because they have been waiting too long at the emergency department even though they know a major trauma has come in.

These people all have a sense of entitlement: they deserve better than others. Talk to anyone in the service industry and you will hear that post pandemic (or whatever we are right now!), so many people have developed a real sense of entitlement. They have become so rude and make the lives of others around them miserable. They throw coffees back at the server because it was made wrong. They allow their children to make horrible messes and just walk away. They inconvenience whole planes filled with people because they refuse to wear a mask.

It is almost as if people have reached their breaking point during the pandemic and need to make up for all the "inconvenience" they personally went through. The problem is they somehow think it was worse for them. They forget that it was a world-wide epidemic. They forget that the people they are acting entitled to also went through the lockdowns and restrictions. They too had to go without specialty coffee. They too had to stay home for vacations. They too went a long time without seeing loved ones. They too may have even lost loved ones.

But it might help to realize something else: this is not something new, this sense of entitlement. Jesus talks about this very thing. He talks about a banquet where people rushed to take the seats of honour. They all want to be closest to the host. Jesus reminds that this can backfire. You might have the host come ask you to move to a lower seat because of a person more deserving.

This is played out in churches every Sunday around the world, isn't it? We are creatures of habit and when someone sits in "our" seat! The shock and horror! I have had newcomers ask me where they can sit because they don't want to sit in "someone's seat". I would love to tell them to sit anywhere they want but I know what can happen and I am sure you do too. We have all seen the huffing and puffing, the dirty looks. I might be more understanding if it was the last seat in the church but look around. That is definitely not the issue, is it?

I have to say that this congregation is very good about not claiming seats though. Well done. We are aware that God is not judging us by where we sit in the church. The message can be heard from anywhere. The Eucharist is received no matter where we sit or even where we receive it from. It will even be brought to those who cannot come up to receive it.

So, what advice does Jesus give us when we feel that we are entitled to something?

*But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher!'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and*

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*those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

I know from experience; this doesn't work in an Anglican Church. If I asked you to move up front, most of you would not feel honoured! We love to sit at the back of the sanctuary, don't we! I thought about roping off two thirds of the sanctuary and making you all sit closer, but you can be glad, I didn't. I am not sure where this habit came from though. I have been to churches in other denominations where the front seats are coveted. Maybe in the Anglican denomination, the service involves so much sitting, standing, using the right book, that we want to always sit behind someone, so we won't do the wrong thing. It is almost as if we feel lightening would strike us if we, horror of horrors, stand alone!

Jesus' lesson is still very relevant to us though. We can stop and think about how we too might be acting entitled. Loving our neighbour also involves treating them with respect. Doesn't your heart just melt when you see help a senior who is struggling to lift something. Or when a mother is trying to calm her child who is having a temper tantrum and someone offers to help. Perhaps you notice someone with very few items waiting in line behind you and you let them go ahead of you even though you are entitled to go first.

We cannot change the behavior of others. Those people who make a scene acting entitled and that they are better than everyone else have their own issues to deal with. If we can help the poor cashier or waitress or steward or whoever who is facing the receiving end of this outburst, we definitely should. Even if it is just to apologise to the poor service worker who has to deal with it.

We can change ourselves though. We can have a look around us before we demand service and make sure we are being fair and kind. We can think about what the other person is dealing with. Perhaps that nurse has just come from watching a mother say goodbye to her dying child. Maybe that waitress has extra tables because someone is off sick. Is it so hard to wear a mask if it helps others be comfortable and potentially stop the spread of disease?

We as North Americans are very privileged people in this world. We have more access to food, clothing, housing, and health care than almost anywhere else in the world. Travel to South America or Central America and you will see how privileged we truly are. I will never forget the little boy offering to share the M&Ms he had been given with me because I didn't have any, even though it was the first thing he had to eat in two days.

Let's remember that if we are running late and need that coffee in a hurry, that is our own problem, not the person at the Snapping Turtle! And if we are in the Emergency Department, we can wait our turn. Trust me, if your emergency is greater than someone else's, you will be seen first. Your broken leg hurts but the man with the heart attack will take priority.

So, let's find new ways to love our neighbours. Let's work on losing our sense of entitlement. Whether it is giving up our place in line or refusing to buy a product that is produced at the expense of others, we each can find a way to enrich the lives of the less privileged.