

## We All Rise When We Lift Each Other Up – Part 2

Yesterday we reflected briefly on what it means to come closer to the heart of Jesus, in finding wholeness through connectedness. Today we will expand a little more on that theme as we look at a passage from Luke chapter 9. You may like to have a pen and paper handy to jot own any thoughts you may have in response to some questions later in this reflection.

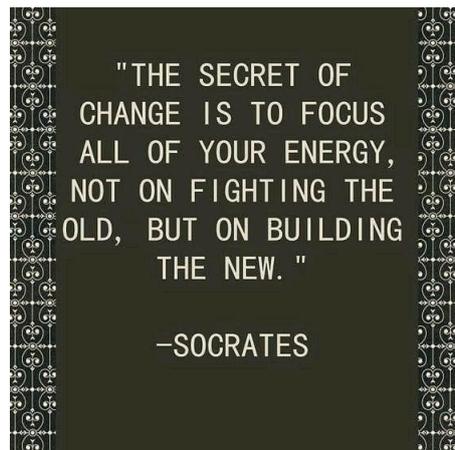
But first let's read the passage:

Luke 9: 46-50

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."

"Master," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."



The disciples give me hope. They were a real motley crew, a seemingly random group of people that were brought together by Jesus in a certain place at a certain time. They were all so very different, and all filled with human emotion, prone to mistakes, misunderstandings and selfish wants and desires such as that which we can see in the passage today.

Sometimes I wonder, how on earth did they all fit together? What was going through Jesus' mind when he called them, as individuals, to be part of something else. Something entirely unconventional. Something counter cultural. Something that required their individual strengths and weaknesses to come together as a whole.

Then it struck me. Jesus had built a Huf House! A Huf House built of people. A Huf House is a prefab house kit – it comes with all its constituent parts and it is only once it is built – with

all the parts in their place, does the construction have its overall strength. There are many different designs, but the concept is the same. All the parts must work together to create the home. If just once piece lacks integrity then the whole project is incomplete.

So the disciples and their random coming together could not have been so random. Jesus called each of them to the task for a reason, to support the integrity of the whole. And yet they were human, with human failings and with their own foolish designs of grandeur.

This passage makes me smile and wince at the same time. Yes, they are human, but the image of them clambering all over each other to be the “best one” is really rather distasteful. Didn’t they know what they had? As a team, didn’t they know what they had with Jesus? All that learning together, what they must have seen and heard together and yet here it seems all they were interested in was squabbling amongst themselves over who was the best. Anyone who has studied group dynamics will know that this is a common theme in even small groups of people around a leader. So perhaps we should expect it. It doesn’t stop it being a bit disappointing though. All that time they have spent in Jesus’ company and yet they are still slipping back into old and unnecessary behaviours.

I imagine sometimes that Jesus must have sat with his head in his hands wondering why on earth they didn’t get it!

Or perhaps not. We are told that Jesus knew their thoughts – he can see the good in them, just that sometimes he needed to tease it out of them. He treats them with compassion, he understands their humanness but that doesn’t stop him calling out their bad behaviour. He challenges them to step up. To move beyond what they are to what they could be.

He draws them nearer to understanding.

His message is unequivocal. It cannot go on like this, you must be better at this. You cannot stay where you are or it won’t work.

Where is he drawing them to? Closer to him. Closer to his heart. He is drawing them into alignment with him and so with God. In Jesus’ time children didn’t have any rights, they were amongst the lowest in social standing and yet Jesus is telling the disciples that by putting the children first they were choosing to put him first, to put God first in their lives. In doing so, they would be seeing the world through Christlike eyes. He is challenging us to do the same. To welcome everyone. To truly welcome them. Not just to pay lip service to it, but to actually have a true change of heart, a change of thoughts. That requires work. That requires us to recognise our own failings and be willing to change them. Jesus knows our thoughts and only he can help us make those changes – but ultimately it is up to us to choose.

Going back to the story, of course, the disciples, still not quite grasping the mettle tried to tattle tale on others, passing the blame and deflecting their misunderstanding, rather like children caught out at school: “I know I shouldn’t have been mucking about in class Miss, but Miss, I saw Timmy smoking behind the Science Block, Miss.”

Jesus quickly moves to call them out again. Their attitude of “he is not one of us” is again distasteful behaviour. Where is the welcome? Jesus rebukes them, saying that “for whoever is not against you is for you.” Encouraging words – but there is another message here too. It is in what is not said. It is a call to be wary – a challenge for them to really think about their welcome not just to those “outside” the group but to those within it. It is the same call to us to look and think deeper – who are we against? Where is our welcome? Are we wholeheartedly for each other or is there a silent “against” going on? What does that do to the integrity of the whole? What stories are we telling each other to justify our thoughts and/ or our actions and what can we do to change? As Revd Gerry often says: “It starts with me.” I think this is what Jesus is encouraging, no challenging, the disciples, and us to do.

As a team Jesus could not have them openly or silently against anyone, least of all the other members of the group. It undermines the structure, the integrity of the whole. This lesson was perhaps one of the most important he would teach them but they had to be willing too, willing to step out of their comfort zone and come together as a whole.

It’s not about “working” together. We can all do that, work with someone we find difficult or even loathesome. The true change of heart, Christlike in its transformation is to choose to come together with that person – so it’s not about work, but more about love.

Love of this kind is sacrificial. We have to be willing to put aside our ego, our need for self-promotion and to think about the whole, to be part of the whole. To be willing to sit further down the pew so that others can have their time to shine. It’s about sharing and caring for each other – about extending that welcome with a true change of heart.

I will be reading and rereading this passage today, thinking about my own welcome and praying into it starting with me. Join with me in looking deeper. Join with me in seeking to come closer to Jesus heart. To reject any against we may have – be they silent or not. Hear Jesus’ words today and join with me in remembering that we all rise when we lift each other up.