

Melva's Corner

THANKSGIVING

November 21, 2005

Bible Text: Matthew 25:45

Central Truth: God help us to set a place for Jesus at our Thanksgiving table on Thursday and all of the Thursdays to come.

Thanksgiving, we assume, is a day to be surrounded by family and friends. It's a day of celebration. We certainly show our gratitude for God's blessings, by consuming huge quantities of them. By laughing with people who we love. And there's nothing wrong with all that, of course. I'm just concerned that Thanksgiving has become yet another excuse to turn inward, to relax, to enjoy **self**. Are we becoming too much like the rich man in Jesus' parable, I fear; eating well and living in comfort while the Lazaruses outside our door are begging for alms, being licked by dogs, and dying in piles of garbage. And all of this taking place on our watch.

Really, the worries and concerns many of us will bring to our Thanksgiving tables are trivial and self-centered. Family squabbles over who said what to whom? Please. Financial problems? Don't you have a fridge full of leftovers right now? Problems at work? Hey, you have a job, and can get another one. There are folks who would gladly trade our problems for the ones they bring to the table -- or would bring if they had a table to bring them to.

"Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me," says Jesus. It's one of the most startling and troubling of all the startling and troubling things He said. Someone in this parable dropped the ball. Hope that's not my miss, but I'm afraid that it is. At least partially. I wonder if there's any valid excuse for homelessness and hunger, for people dying on Thanksgiving Day or any other day, in a country in which the church is so wealthy and prosperous. I think not. It seems the only reason for it is that we fail to see how people could experience God's love and share in His blessings through our generosity. It's either that we don't see or deep down we don't care enough to put ourselves out. And I can't bear to think it's the latter.

Jesus' point in identifying Himself with "the least": the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned was to let us know that He stands with the very folks our society overlooks, the have-nots. "What you fail to do for them," He reminds us; you fail to do for me. And by counting Himself among them, He makes overlooking them impossible. To serve them is to serve Him, and to neglect them is to neglect Him. He makes it impossible for us to cherish Him in our hearts without cherishing those on the fringes.

Recent natural disasters, in our world, have uncovered the ugly under belly of the less fortunate, the ones we had come to view as invisible.

It takes time to help the less fortunate. Christian service requires a mega investment. Have you noticed how much encouragement it takes for a new believer? Do you know that alcoholics often need to talk to somebody at 2:30 in the morning? Are you aware that people who lead others to Christ typically do so by investing huge amounts of time and interest in them over time? Spiritual service calls for the sacrifice of time and energy on the behalf of others.

I've made some decisions. Next year will be different for me. But I'm not waiting until then to change some things about myself. You shouldn't wait either if you need to make some of the same changes. Start thinking and praying about how you can serve the less fortunate. Ask God to remind you that Jesus stands with them and that devotion to Him must include devotion to them. Ask Him to open your heart in generosity and to open doors to share the blessings He's given you. Talk to the leaders of your church about what your congregation is already doing for the poor and be an advocate for them if there is currently no one in your church to do that. Offer to take a community leadership role in serving "the least" of them.

God help us to set a place for Jesus at our Thanksgiving table on Thursday and all of the Thursdays to come.

Memory Text

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (Matthew 25:45)