

Ordinary 30C - 2019

Pride

I heard about a fifth grader that came home from school so excited. She had been voted "prettiest girl in the class." The next day she was even more excited when she came home, for the class had voted her "the most likely to succeed." The next day she came home and told her mother she had won a third contest, being voted "the most popular." But the next day she came home extremely upset. The mother said, "What happened, did you lose this time?" She said, "Oh no, I won the vote again." The mother said, "What were you voted this time?" She said, "most stuck up." Well this Pharisee would have won that contest hands down. He had an "i" problem. Five times you will read the little pronoun "i" in these two verses. He was stoned on the drug of self. He suffered from two problems: inflation and deflation. He had an inflated view of who he was, and a deflated view of who God was. His pride had made him too big for his spiritual britches. C. S. Lewis once said, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and of course, as long as you are looking down, you can't see something that's above you." (by James Merritt from *Collected Sermons*, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc.)

Are You Really Listening?

In his book *Directions*, author James Hamilton shares this insight about listening to God: "Before refrigerators, people used icehouses to preserve their food. Icehouses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the icehouses, and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer. One man lost a valuable watch while working in an icehouse. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. 'I closed the door,' the boy replied, 'lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking.'" Often the question is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are being still enough, and quiet enough, to hear. Yes, Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father always listens to us, but do we really listen to God?

Do we follow the instructions of Psalm 46, "Be still, and know that I am God"? (by Eric S. Ritz from *The Ritz Collection*, www.Sermons.com)

Worth a Thousand Points

Perhaps you have heard the story of the man who came to the gates of heaven to be greeted by St. Peter. Peter asks the man if he can give a brief history of his life with an emphasis on the good deeds he had done in order to gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven. "You will need 1000 points to be admitted," Peter tells the man. "This will be a cinch," the man thinks to himself, "I've been involved in church from the days of my youth." Then he begins to list his activities for Peter. He was an officer in his youth group, served in every possible position he could as a youngster. Was on the Church Council and every committee the church had to offer. His list was extensive. "Very impressive," Peter smiles at the man. An angel standing with them also smiled and nodded as he tallied the points and then whispered in Peter's ear. Peter tells the man, "This is quite striking -- we seldom see men of your very good works. You will be pleased to know that you have 327 points! Is there anything else you can think of?" The poor soul breaks into a cold sweat and begins to reach deep for every single act of kindness he could think of. He listed them as the angel scratched furiously on his angelic clip board and nodded his head in admiration. Peter looks at the clip board and says, "This is quite exceptional! You now have a total of 402 points. Can you think of anything else?" The distressed guy strives to recall good deeds -- like the time he helped a little old lady across the street. He finally arrives at a grand total of 431 points and cries out... "I am sunk! There is no hope for me! What more could I have done? O Lord, all I can do is beg for your mercy!" "THAT," exclaims Peter, "Is a thousand points!" So also, the tax collector in Jesus' parable finds his hope in the grace and mercy of God. (by John Jewell from *Qualities of Faith*)