

Those of you who get and read The Seattle Times know the Sunday edition has a “Rant and Rave” column. Recently there was a “rant” from someone who was complaining about a person cutting in front of the checkout line. From reading the article I don’t think the person complained at all at the time but wrote to “Rant and Rave” hoping the person read and saw themselves in the column. As I read this I thought about Peter and what his response would be in light of verses 8 and 9 of our text today: “Please go right ahead. You must have a busy life and may our God Bless you!”

God Bless You – a new response to a broken world. Peter is summing up how a Christian life should be lived. Paul in Romans 13:10b summed it up this way: “...therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” There is the world’s view and Christ’s view. These are at best at odds with each other:

- World looks at the mighty and powerful – Christ looks at the “least of these”.
- World comes pushing an agenda – Christ comes ready to listen and love.
- World comes time conscience – Christ comes with eternity.
- World rushes by – Christ stops and stays for a while.
- World calls for retribution – Christ calls for grace and forgiveness.

Christ calls for us to “be a blessing”. We are, according to Peter’s words, to live in harmony, be agreeable and get along with one another. And for good measure, he also tosses in that we are to be compassionate and humble. Christ asks us to go the extra mile. We are to look beyond the person and discover the reason behind the actions.

As the Wings program progressed and we began to know the temperament of the students we were able to tell when something had happened that made their actions different from other days. Usually there is a reason why a person does the actions they do or misbehave. As the hours progressed we would learn of something that had happened in school or at home that was responsible for the change in their behavior— if we listened.

There was an individual who would eat everything left on the table following church suppers. Now, to say the least, this angered some people. They did not view his as appropriate behavior! However, one evening the person shared their life story. They grew up in extreme poverty and had spent many childhood days without any food at all. When they did have food it was consumed immediately and quickly – they never knew if they would have food for another day. There was reason behind the action and now it was easier to understand the behavior. Anger became compassion.

It is far easier to jump to a conclusion than to find the truth or reason behind the behavior.

The way of the world is “an eye for an eye.” (It is in the Bible isn’t it?) North Korea is now rattling the world’s patience as these last few days have been filled with what some call unacceptable behavior from the North Korean government. What are we thinking? How are we going to respond? Will more restrictions bring about what we are hoping for? If more sanctions are applied it will only bring more hunger and

poverty to those who have no control over what their government is doing. More sanctions probably will not harm the ones we are intending to harm.

I don't know, but, what if...we who like to think we are a Christian nation acted as one? What if we decided to become a "blessing"? What if we did as Peter demands? Find a way to say: God Bless You. We discover ways to live out God's blessing on the people of North Korea – getting them food for their children, their elderly. I don't know...but would it hurt to try?

Be a blessing. Now this is not a new idea. Peter's words come from Psalm 34. This is what Israel should have been doing since it was called/chosen to be the very people of God. This is not a new or radical teaching from Christ and Peter. It has been a part of the faith for generations. Jesus confirmed it when he said that our neighbors were anyone in need (Luke 10:25-37). We are one in the world and one in Christ. Israel was called to be a blessing, an influence on the lives around them – however they fell into the trap of becoming like their neighbors rather than influencing them.

We need to learn from their lessons – God has blessed us in Christ and we are to be a blessing to the world. This is how we should behave—sharing the news of God's love, hope and forgiveness. Finding ways to say and demonstrate "God Bless You." This is NOT how we do behave, unfortunately. We still want to demand an eye for an eye. Our motto has become: Do unto others before they do unto us.

Peter goes on to say, "*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord*" (3:15 NIV). He continues that we are always to be ready to give a reason for the faith we have and for our actions. We are often ready to give – in detail – but we often miss the rest of his admonition, "*But do this with gentleness and respect.*" Whoops! We seem to have forgotten this part. We prefer the Crusades. We want to force people to accept. We must learn to listen to people and respect where they are coming from if we want them to listen to us.

I am reading a wonderful book: Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations...One School at a Time. It is the story of Greg Mortenson, son of Lutheran missionaries in Africa. He was descending from an attempt to reach the summit of K2 when he got separated from his guide and ended up alone in a remote Pakistani village. He discovered there was no school in the village and promised to build them one. The book describes his journey of building a school not only for that village but others in northern Pakistan. (Of course, before he could build the school he had to build a bridge, literally—how else could the supplies for the school be delivered? He learned that in order to be effective he had to stop and listen to what the people in the villages were saying (not always an easy thing for an American to do). As one of his Pakistani village mentors said, he needed to drink three cups of tea. This gave time for him to hear the stories.

I wish many Christians today would understand this and realize this is what Peter is calling us to do. We have tried to make others like us and expect the world to fall into step behind us and it has not worked. We often fail to listen to them. We have lost gentleness and respect of Peter's admonition.

It was graduation day at the College of Theology. Each department of Central Philippine University has its own graduation ceremony before the larger college-wide one. We were there to honor the graduates of School of Theology and we were dressed in our best, cool, Filipino barongs (dress shirts). One of the others present that day was a Filipino pastor celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his graduation. He was proud that he still had and was wearing his graduation suit: It was black wool! He also had a starched white shirt and black tie. It was 90 degrees+ with about 99% humidity and it wasn't raining! Black wool? He came over and looked at us and then asked: "Why did the missionaries in the past make us dress like them?!" We had no answer, just an apology.

Why do we think the world needs to look just like us? Cannot the Gospel be preached in a Filipino barong as well as a black wool suit? After all do we dress like Jesus?

We got it wrong. We are not called to make clones. We are called to make disciples. We are called to bring others to faith and then let them live it out as God has called them. We are simply to be those who bring the blessings of God to a broken world. Or in simple words: God Bless You. We are to be a blessing to the world. After all, isn't Pentecost God's Blessing on the Church?

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989  
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1984  
Mortenson, Greg Y Relin, David Oliver, Three Cups of Tea, Penguin Group, NY 2006