

"THE PEOPLE JESUS LOVED"

(Luke 17:11-19)

© 2024 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 11-17-24]

**[PROP NEEDED: "Monsters University" Video Clip]**

--I--

1. Read CEB Scripture text: Luke 17:11-19 and pray
2. **[WATCH VIDEO: "Monsters University" (0:55:46-0:57:09, Total Time 1:23)]**  
You know, as in the make-believe world of Disney's "*Monsters University*," we humans also have a tendency to judge others based on *outward* appearance... what they wear, how they're built, their age, color of their skin, where they have tattoos/facial jewelry, etc.

A--It's only human to do this. <sup>1</sup> The problem comes (as we saw in the video) when we start reducing a persons' entire *identity* to the superficiality of those *outward* things.

1--We assume certain things about them, leading us to stereotype and categorize them: ...they're rich, poor, middle class; ...black, white, Mexican, Korean; ...gay, straight; ...redneck, Yankee, a floozy; ...flaming liberal, narrow-minded conservative, etc. <sup>2</sup>

2--And more times than not, our assumptions about others are tragically mistaken.

B--And even when they're not, what we tend to do is *use* those assumptions as an excuse for associating with people who are *like* us (who make us feel comfortable), and *steering clear* of those who are *different* from us (who make us feel *uncomfortable*).

C--We see this happening a lot in today's world, where some folks use stereotypes and caricatures of people who are different from themselves to entice others to fear them.

3. Well, today's scripture from Luke 17 invites us to consider how Jesus' example of radical love for others can help us overcome our human tendency to stereotype and judge others based solely on *outward* appearance.

--II--

4. Before unpacking it, let's remember that throughout history, we humans have struggled with this tendency to stereotype others, and Jesus' day was no different.

A--Consider, for example, that people of his time were lumped into the various **religious categories of Judaism**. There were...

1--...The *Sadducees* <sup>3</sup>, the *Pharisees* <sup>4</sup>, the *Essenes* <sup>5</sup>, and the *Zealots* <sup>6</sup>, each a separate group which distrusted the others & thought of theirs as "true" Judaism.

2--There was the *broad majority* of Jews in first-century Palestine who didn't follow *any* of these, but merely tried to be good Jews & decent human beings.

3--And there was what we would today call *the non-religious and nominally religious people* -- including the "sinners," most of whom were *never* included as part of the ongoing religious life of Judaism.

B--But there were also various **ethnic categories** in Jesus' day. Remember that Israel was a tiny country divided into three basic geographic regions:

1--*Galilee* in the north (where Jesus grew up) & *Jerusalem & Judea* in the south.

(a) The people down south thought people from Galilee were "*country hicks*" (remember Peter's accent) <sup>7</sup>, and the Galileans thought of those in the south as snobs.

(b) And Galilee especially also contained many *Gentiles* -- people like Greeks, & the Roman occupying forces, who were considered heathen and "unclean" simply because they weren't Jewish.

2--*And sandwiched between Galilee & Judea was the region known as Samaria*, which contained people of mixed descent. Intermarriages produced a population which was half-Jewish, half-Gentile -- people who were accepted fully into neither Jewish nor Gentile culture (that's the man in today's story who gave thanks).

C--Finally, there were also **socio-economic categories**, like the rich & the poor that Jesus talked so much about in the gospels, <sup>8</sup> the educated & uneducated, and there were whole groups that were considered social outcasts: lepers (like all of those in today's scripture); the disabled; the mentally ill; and women (considered 2nd-class citizens).

--III--

5. Yet, the Bible is clear that Jesus *didn't* minister to or love people the way you it was done in his day, or even the way that you and I tend to do it today.

A--Instead, he looked *beyond* the categories & stereotypes & saw people & their needs. <sup>9</sup>

B--For example, the stories of Jesus in the gospels tell us that he ministered to...

1--The *disabled* <sup>10</sup>, whose diseases were considered a product of their sin.

2--*Lepers* <sup>11</sup> and *Samaritans* <sup>12</sup>, both in today's scripture, and who were both shunned and despised by others.

3--*Women* <sup>13</sup> (who "respectable" Jewish men weren't to even fellowship with), and to the *mentally ill*, *demon possessed*, and *homeless*. <sup>14</sup>

4--And Jesus even ministered to the hated *Gentiles & Roman Soldiers* <sup>15</sup>, to the *Poor* <sup>16</sup>, as well as to the *Rich and Wealthy*. <sup>17</sup>

6. Today's story from Luke 17 illustrates this in many ways.

A--Traveling through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters ten outcast lepers, calling for him to have mercy on them.

B--Not only does he heal them of their disease, but praises one of them (a hated, despised Samaritan) for turning back and saying thank you.

C--In other words, when all that anyone else could see about these men was WHAT they were (non-persons because of their disease and ethnicity), Jesus saw in them WHO they were & who they could become, & (perhaps for the first time in their lives) they experienced the unconditional love of God which treated them as true human beings.

D--And that's what Jesus' radical love does for *us* today, as well.

1--When Jesus looks at you & me, he doesn't see all the names or labels by which others see or judge us -- he doesn't even see all our mistakes, or all the ways we've blown it.

2--He doesn't see us as Democrats or Republicans, Liberals or Conservatives, Progressives or Traditionalists, or as Black, White, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or Native American.

3--No. He sees and loves us for who we *ARE* (children of our heavenly Father) and for who we *CAN BECOME* when we truly follow Him.

7. You may or may not have caught this in the video clip from earlier, but the monster fraternity to which Mike, Sulley and their friends belong is called "*Oozma Kappa*," which (intentionally) is symbolized by the letters "*O.K.*"

A--Well, in the movie, they all eventually learn that they don't have to be someone or something they're NOT in order to be "*O.K.*"

B--And so it is with God: no matter who we are -- even when we're left out or different from others -- we are *all* accepted, loved, and "*O.K.*" in God's eyes.

--IV--

8. So, these stories (yes) teaches us something about the radical love of *Jesus*. But they also teach us **something about the kind of love that we as Christians are to have for *others***, as well.

A--For example, I believe it teaches that we as God's church should be a place where we look *beyond* the human categories, stereotypes, and labels that the rest of the world uses -- a place where people are seen and loved the way Jesus sees and loves us.

B--This is actually one of the intents behind our church's new Vision for ministry... being "*A church that is a beacon of unity, growth and impact for all generations, where every voice is heard and every heart is touched.*"

C--God's Church should be the one place where people walk in and say, "*Wow! That's different! They don't look at me the way the rest of the world looks at me. They love me for me, rather than for who they want me to be!"*"<sup>18</sup>

D--Now we all know, of course, that we're *not* there yet, either individually or as a church

1--More often than we'd like to admit, people visit a church (including ours), and because of their skin color, or the way they dress, or the ring in their nose, or the part of town they live in, we distance ourselves from them.

2--...Not usually on purpose. But we do it nevertheless by greeting and huddling around only those people that we know, and who're like us, or by not including newer, different folks in our social gatherings or groups.

9. **So how, then, DO we become more like Jesus? How do we overcome this human tendency to categorize and stereotype others?**

A--Well, first we need to *become aware* of the fact that we do it (unintentionally and otherwise), and *ask God's forgiveness* for it.

B--Then, we need to intentionally *seek out* the image of God in others (especially those who aren't like us) -- to *see* the good and the God in them (regardless of what appearance seems to be on the *outside*).

C--And when we do that, we'll find God empowering us to be the kind of people that He'd have us be --to see "*The People Jesus Loved*" & to love them radically, as he did.

10. [PRAYER: "*Lord Jesus, we give you thanks and praise for your love and mercy towards the lame, the lepers, the outcasts, and the prostitutes who came to you -- people whom others only saw for what they were, and yet you saw them for who they were and who they could become. We ask for your forgiveness for any ways that we may not have extended your welcome to all of your people. Forgive us for our tendency to still see people for what they are and not who they are. Lord, help this to be a congregation that reaches out with your love to every person in our community and world, regardless of how 'left out' or 'different' they might seem. In the process, we ask that you transform our own hearts and lives that we might see as you see, and love as you love. In your holy name we pray, Amen.*"]

**ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> *All* humans (consciously or not) make these kinds of assumptions, categorizations, and value judgements about others. It is a part of our human nature to do so, and the Bible teaches that it's been this way from the very beginning. Consider the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4: Cain killed Abel because he (a farmer) was jealous of his brother (a rancher). In fact, the Old Testament is filled with stories of one people group oppressing another people group, or trying to separate themselves from another people group, so that by the end of the Old Testament there's a desperate need for someone to come and straighten the whole thing out. That someone, of course, was Jesus. He came to teach us what God really intended for us as human beings --how we are to relate to and understand one another as fellow children of God.

<sup>2</sup> In other words, we begin to make value judgments about them, about what they stand for, and even about *who* they are as people. This is true even if we sense that they're somehow in some category that's "higher" than us (maybe more educated or wealthier, etc.). In these cases, we often find ways to criticize them so that (at least in our eyes) they come back down to *our* level.

And at our worst, these value judgments manifest themselves in terrible ways, as they have throughout history, with horrors like slavery and the Holocaust. These are examples where for thousands of years people bought and sold other human beings, believing that somehow because of THEIR religious, ethnic, or economic status they had the "right" to own another human being. Or perhaps because one was a male and one was a female they had a "right" to control those who were in a different category from themselves. Or maybe there was a master-race designated by God to be in charge, and some of the lesser races were so far below that they needed to be eliminated.

<sup>3</sup> The small but rich aristocracy of Israel who controlled the Jerusalem Temple, the High Priesthood, & the ruling religious body (the Sanhedrin).

<sup>4</sup> The dominate branch of Judaism in that day who thought the Sadducees were stuck-up snobs, but were still legalistic in many ways themselves.

<sup>5</sup> Though not mentioned directly in the New Testament, the Essenes were nevertheless highly influenced it's development. They were the group that formed the Qumran community, out of which the famous "Dead Sea Scrolls" were developed. They felt that both the Sadducees and Pharisees had Judaism wrong, and that *their* way of withdrawing from society was the only way to be "pure." They rejected the rituals of the Temple and the synagogue and withdrew to form their own monastic communities.

<sup>6</sup> They wanted to overthrow the Roman government by force, and encouraged open rebellion and acts of terrorism and violence to this end. Barabbas, the man freed by Pilate at the urging of the Passover crowd in Luke 23:18-19, was a Zealot, and some scholars have speculated that Judas Iscariot (the one who betrayed Jesus) was a Zealot, as well.

<sup>7</sup> They were said to even talk with an accent (remember what was said about Peter's accent in Luke 22:59).

<sup>8</sup> Even among the rich, there were the rich who came by their riches honestly, and then there were the dishonest rich like the "tax collectors." And among the poor there was lower class of poor and an ordinary class of poor.

<sup>9</sup> Read Jesus' understanding of his own calling from God in Luke 4:18-19 and Luke 17:21.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Luke 5:17-26 and 13:10-17. In Jesus' day, people thought that if a person was paralyzed or blind, it was because either they or their parents had sinned.

<sup>11</sup> In Jesus' day, lepers had to cry out "*Unclean!*" as they walked around in public so that no one would come near them. Leprosy was considered contagious, and lepers were not allowed to live or associate with the rest of society. They were shunned and despised. And yet, Luke 5:12-14 and 17:11-19 tells us stories of Jesus not only associating with lepers, but actually touching and healing them.

<sup>12</sup> Read Luke 10:25-37 and 17:16. Consider that Jesus walked through Samaria to do ministry, not around it as a "good Jew" should have done. What's more is that in Luke 10 we read Jesus telling a story about a man who'd fallen on the road. He'd been robbed, beaten and left for dead. Well, remember that in that story there were 2 really religious Jews who passed by on the other side instead of helping the man. And what made the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees so irritated at him was the fact that the hero of his story was a hated Samaritan.

<sup>13</sup> Consider Luke 8:1-3 (where Jesus accepts women as his followers) and Luke 10:38-42 (where Jesus dared to be received into a home owned by a woman). In a day and time when "good, upright, respectable" Jewish men didn't fellowship with women, eat at the table with them, or even allow them in the same room with the men, Jesus ministered to women. In a time when women were certainly not treated as equals with men, by his ministry with them, he elevated them to his own status.

<sup>14</sup> Consider Luke 8:26-39 and 9:37-43.

<sup>15</sup> Read Luke 7:1-10, where Jesus heals a Roman centurion's slave.

<sup>16</sup> Read 16:19-31, Jesus' story of the Lazarus and the rich man in heaven.

<sup>17</sup> Read Luke 19:1-10, the story of Jesus associating with and dining in the home of Zacchaeus the tax collector. In Verse 10 of that passage, Jesus explains his mission in relationship to even this hated tax collector by saying that *"the Son of Man has come to seek out and to save the lost."* To this list one could also add the sexually-broken and those caught in addictive lifestyles of sin (Read Luke 7:36-50, and, from another gospel, John 8:3-11).

<sup>18</sup> Read Galatians 3:28-29. Somewhere along the way, when others look at us as Christians, they need to see that there's something different about us in how we look at other people and how we respond to other people, especially people who are different than us.