

Love is Respectful

Luke 7:36-50

***Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking.
1 Cor 13:5***

One night in the 1960s, at 11.30pm, an older African American woman was standing on the side of an Alabama highway, trying to endure a lashing rainstorm. Her car had broken down and she desperately needed a ride. Soaking wet, she decided to flag down the next car. A young white man stopped to help her, a thing generally unheard of in those conflict-filled days. The man took her to safety, helped her get assistance and put her into a taxicab.

She seemed to be in a big hurry, but she wrote down his address and thanked him. Seven days went by and a knock came to the man's door. To his surprise, a giant console colour TV was delivered to his home. A special note was attached.

Thank you so much for assisting me on the highway the other night. The rain drenched not only my clothes, but also my spirits. Then you came along. Because of you, I was able to make it to my dying husband's bedside just before he passed away.. God bless you for helping me and unselfishly serving others. Sincerely, Mrs Nat King Cole.

I start with that story, because it illustrates what I understand respect to be. To **respect** someone means that ***we show by our actions that we honour them and give them value in our sight.*** And we can do no better than take Jesus as our example. People felt valued when they were in his presence. Take the gospel passage we just heard read. We can find there *four signs of Jesus' respect for others* – all of which we can emulate.

1. Stop. We're to stop talking and become a good listener.

Jesus was a wonderful listener. He listened so well to Simon, he even read his thoughts. But Jesus especially listened to the woman. I expect you're thinking, *But she never uttered a word!* But Jesus listened to her thoughts too. Wasn't she saying something to Jesus? That could be read in her tears which wet his feet, in her drying them with her unbound hair, in her kissing them, and pouring perfume on them? Jesus alone, it seems, could **hear** what she was saying.

Am I – are you – a good listener? Would **others** say we're good listeners? When we're with others, do we give them our full attention? Even when we greet each other at the Peace – do we avoid looking directly at one other? Do our eyes turn away, looking to greet the next person?

Or would some of our friends – but they're too polite – tell us, *Please stop talking! Please stop giving me your advice! Please stop – and really listen to me!*

2. No U-Turn. We're to become a good promise-keeper!

One Christmas I promised my son I'd spend time with him helping to create his much wished-for model railway layout. Sadly I defaulted on this promise. I had my excuses – pressure of work, etc – but it was not only my son's loss – it was mine too! The years of childhood are fleeting, and when they've passed, we cannot go back to them. Children especially value **our promises** – what does it say to them when we fail to keep them?

Jesus made this unnamed woman a promise we're apt to take for granted. **Your sins are forgiven.** She'd lived a sinful life – she hadn't known God loved her and would forgive her, if she turned from that life. But she'd heard Jesus teach that – and now she heard it spoken to her personally. It was a promise of being made clean; a new beginning, a new relationship with God, a new destiny. And although *she* didn't know it, it would all depend on what Jesus was going to do for her, by dying on the cross for her sins – and yours and mine. **For Jesus keeps his promises, all of them.** This woman knew herself valued and honoured, as she never had been before!

3. Yield – Give Way. Forget your 'rights' and be a good servant.

This woman showed her love and gratitude, by her unselfconscious actions of service to Jesus. She showed her love in a costly way, by doing it in the presence of strangers, who thought ill of her, who thought her actions unseemly and inappropriate. And she lavished on Jesus the expense of her perfume. If we really want to thank

Jesus for his love for us – we must be prepared to do it publicly, even when it invites scorn, and we must expect it to be costly.

And it will be necessary *now* to do it by being a good servant to others, for Jesus' sake. **Has anyone in your life honoured you** by serving you, with no thought for themselves, and maybe at great cost?

My first wife did that. My temporary university job in the UK was coming to an end, and I had successfully applied for a post-doctoral fellowship in Canada. But the grant wasn't enough for her and our little children to come too, at least in the first year. One night in bed, before I left, she asked me to feel a lump in her breast. In my preoccupation, I just said, *Go and see George* – our doctor. The significance of her anxiety escaped me, and in her love for me she was still willing to part with me for a year, to help my career.

What supplies the motive for honouring and valuing others like this? Isn't it that **Jesus laid down his life for us, his friends?** *Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12,13)*

4. Slow Down. We're to be a good looker at others, to see them as God does.

You see this road sign when you're travelling too fast for the road you're on. When we're in danger of hurting others because we don't see them properly. We need to slow down and look – with the insight **God** is willing to give us.

Simon, and no doubt his other guests too, saw this woman at best as an interruption, and at worst as a whore. **But not Jesus.** He saw her as one God loved, as one he would die for, as a precious daughter in his kingdom. He treated her as having value, and honoured her.

A man wrote this about his time in college: “During my second month there, our professor gave us a quiz. I was a conscientious student and breezed through the questions until I read the last one.

What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school? Surely this was some kind of joke. I'd seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50s, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward his grade. *Absolutely*, said the professor, *In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say "hello". I have never forgotten that lesson*", the man wrote. He also learnt her name was Dorothy.

Wouldn't it change **our** day if we started it with the prayer, *Lord, help me to see every person I meet as you see them?* We've been looking at the lessons **we** can learn from one incident in Jesus' life. We can reinforce those lessons from other stories in the Bible.

Am I a good listener? We can learn from other conversations of our Lord, like the one he had with the woman at the well of Samaria. We can also ask ourselves, ***Am I a good listener to God?*** In some ways that's not so very different, because he often speaks to us *through* other people, asking **us** to hear **their** needs, pay attention to their anxieties. If we refuse to listen to them, we're probably **not** listening to God's own words, either. I'm reminded of two incidents in the O.T. One concerns the prophet Jeremiah, who had faithfully preached to God's people, who had departed in many ways from the Lord. He was no longer allowed to go to the Temple, so he asked his servant to go there, and read aloud a written record of the words God had given him over the years. This resulted in the king asking to have the words read to him. And as each column on the scroll was read, he cut it off and threw it into his fire. He was showing God he neither valued him nor would honour him. (*Jer 36:1-26*)

The second story concerns King Josiah. When Josiah was 26 he ordered that the Temple be repaired, after long neglect. In the course of the work, the scroll of God's Law was discovered (perhaps the book of Deuteronomy). When it was read to him, Josiah wept and tore his robes. He was aghast at the peril his people were in because of their failure to obey God's laws. But because he humbled himself before God, God had mercy. He had honoured

God, and God honoured Josiah. (*2 Chron 34:14-33*) What is **our** response to hearing God's words, addressed to **us**?

Do I respect those around me? *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men.. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men (1 Pet 2:13-15).* How often do **I** make unfavourable comments about others, my colleagues or my boss? If that's **my** attitude – what would I have expected **David** to have done about King Saul, who was hunting him down, to murder him? Yet twice David spared Saul's life, when it was in his power to kill him (*1 Sam 24 & 26*). For David recognised that **Saul's authority was God-given**. And although he'd been chosen to succeed Saul – he would leave the **timing** entirely in God's hands.

Or again, we might think of **Joseph**, a slave in Egypt. When his master's wife tried to seduce him, he refused the temptation (*Gen 39:5-20*). **Why?** Because he **respected** Potiphar – and **respected God**. *How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?* And in speaking to **her** like that, Joseph was also showing her the value and honour he owed her. How different was the behaviour of **David** with Bathsheba – who went so far as to murder Bathsheba's husband to cover up his sin! (*2 Sam 11:1-27*) Joseph's refusal led to God bringing him to a place of honour (and to a wife of his own!), while David's fall led to shame, discord and death in his own family, and in his kingdom. Let's pray about this.

Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for your love and your mercy towards us. You value us so highly, you sent your Son to die instead of us, for our sins. And you have conferred on us the honour of making us your sons and daughters.

Please help us to respect others, in every walk of life, in every daily encounter. Please enable us to be to them a good listener, a good keeper of our promises, a willing servant for their need. And please forgive us for those many times when we've failed you.

As we eat the bread and drink the wine, which remind us of your love, and your promise to us of eternal life, please help us in our resolve to honour you above all, and to love you with all our heart. Amen.