

## **It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know**

### **Cooke's-Portsmouth**

**October 15, 2017**

**Matthew 22:1-14**

I had a brief email exchange recently from a member of the wider community who obviously reads our sign. That is the good news. It was one of those missives that should not be dignified with a response, but, to not respond appears apathetic. And in this time of rising tension and violence, apathy is a serious nemesis. So I took a bit of time to ponder a response rather than responding without giving the matter serious and prayerful consideration. The exchange went like this.

*I notice you have Tai Chi classes advertised on your sign out front. That is occult based practice and discipline. What would Jesus have to say if he visited your Church? I will leave you with that thought.*

I eventually responded:

*Jesus welcomed tax collectors and sinners...I think that he would be pleased at our outreach.*

*Grace to you,*

*Rev. Nadene*

I received a quick response

*Yes he did. But he also roughed up the place when they used his father's house as a market place. Let alone occult practices. But its not me that you have to answer to. I'm just a guy.*

I made the decision to let the matter drop because I know both intellectually and from experience that there is no convincing a person of otherwise once their mind is set. My uncharitable side want to respond, “ Yes you are just a guy who seems pretty confident in knowing the heart and mind of God and speaking on God’s behalf. Just a guy who can speak with some authority about the difference between what is spiritual and evil; that which is pleasing to God and displeasing to God.” I have never thought of Tai Chi as a cult and the pious indictment of our good grace on the part of the author of the email troubled my soul. Against this backdrop of reality there is the reality of this disturbing and engaging parable from Matthew’s gospel that we are to ponder this morning. Before I share with you what I have learned about the parable as I have read copious commentaries written by learned scholars, let me tell what I have learned about Tai Chi. My knowledge is most limited; make no mistake, but I can share this:

The people who cross our threshold for Tai Chi throughout the week are polite and respectful. They leave the hall and kitchen in the condition that they found it, even taking home their tea towels and dish cloths for laundering rather than leaving them to dry in the kitchen. The groups can be quite large but you would scarce know that anyone was in the building once their sessions start. I often hear the instructors who are the last to leave going through a check list to ensure that the door is locked and checking the board to see if the alarm needs to be set. I have never found them less than gracious, polite and respectful.

One day this week I noticed an instructional book on a table in the hall and picked it up. I was curious about the roots of this spiritual discipline. From the introductory pages of the manual I learned the following.

Its founder, Moy Lin Shin knew ill health in his youth in part from the turbulent living conditions of Japanese occupied China during the Second World War. After the war he was initiated into a Taoist temple for training. He vowed that if his health was restored that he would dedicate his life to serving others. He has lived his promise in studying the art; teaching it and using its adherents to make the world a better place. For example, once he read in a local newspaper about a local fire department raising money for a defibrillator. He organized a fundraiser and raised \$8000 in two days and presented the cheque to the first responders.

He has initiated food programs for the hungry and has conducted workshops for those living with HIV/AIDS. He has encouraged participants to support initiatives for health and wholeness, including contributing \$100,000 to a Mississauga Hospital that he had been admitted to prior to his death that was engaged in a fund raising appeal. While I will not presume to speak for God I do have a sense that such compassion and commitment to God's children just might be pleasing to God. At the end of the day it matters very little in the grand scheme of things what I think. God has no need of my picayune insight. And what God desires most is a faithful and contrite heart; however we achieve that. For some it comes through meditation and prayer; mindful practice; the out of doors. For others of us it is through the wit, wisdom and gospel of Jesus Christ. Which brings us to this difficult parable about judgement.

The invitation is to a celestial banquet and the who's who of society had all been invited. But when the time for the celebration was at hand the who's who decided that they had better things to do than attend. So the invitation is rescinded and others are invited. In the time of Jesus this

was one more slap on the face of the establishment who had rejected John, Jesus and others of the prophets sent by God and the invitation has been offered to others; both good and bad.

The parable is another allegory depicting Judeo-Christian history. The king is God, Jesus is the king's son, the invited guests are the Jewish leaders and the reference to the destruction of the city is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in 70 C.E. and the servants who bring in the good and the bad signifies the Gentile Mission of the church. Privilege has been rescinded from the elite and given to others. But expectations of the king continue to run high for those who accepted the invitation as demonstrated in the second parable about the wedding garment.

On the surface it seems rather bizarre. Of course he was not dressed in accordance with custom. He had been going about his daily duties and responsibilities and was not intending on attending a banquet. We see the less than charitable attitude and behaviour of the king and shake our heads in surprise and discomfort. Cut him some slack. But Jesus is not referencing the status quo of the day. While it is subtle the point is large and looming. The wedding garment is righteousness; behaviour in accordance with the teaching of Jesus.

The wedding feast is the age to come and the robe is that of righteousness. He represents those who believe that they can get an easy by into paradise because of good deeds; get their on one's own. But we see the reaction of the King in the parable to arrogance. If one accepts the gospel then one must conform to the life of the gospel. And what might that mean? It means integrating the teachings of Jesus and living them. Jesus said:

Follow me.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.

You are the salt of the earth but if salt has lost its taste it is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and tramples under foot.

‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult\* a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool”, you will be liable to the hell\* of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister\* has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

‘Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, “Let me take the speck out of your eye”, while the log is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.

‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.’

Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

You see it is not what you know, but who you know that matters. Amen.