

Very Important Person

September 6, 2009

(Pentecost 14 - Year B)

James 2: 1-17

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

A few summers ago, my friend, Mark, was spending the summer doing some corporate training in the Los Angeles area.

Mark had a corporate apartment in Los Angeles, and I got the idea to go out and visit him that summer, since I would not have to pay for a hotel room.

I also decided that this trip to LA would make a great guys-only trip. So, I took both of my sons and we headed out west for our first visit to Los Angeles.

We saw all the tourist sights: the Rose Bowl, a baseball game at Dodger Stadium, and a tour of the Hollywood movie studios.

We also went to Universal Studios.

Universal Studios allows you to see how movies are made - plus it is also an amusement park.

My friend, Mark, had advised us not to buy regular tickets to Universal Studios.

Instead, he advised us to buy special VIP tickets.

Since I intended for this trip with my sons to be a once in a lifetime experience, I went ahead and shelled out the money to buy the VIP tickets.

When we arrived at Universal Studios, because we had a VIP pass, we were issued a special tag to wear around our neck.

This special VIP tag got us into behind the scenes tours of the movie sets.

And this special VIP pass enabled us to always cut to the front of the line for all the musical shows and all the amusement park rides.

Because of this VIP treatment, I think that we rode most of the rides 5 or 6 times.

We would get off of an awesome ride, then immediately cut in front of the common folks who had a regular ticket - because we were allowed onto the ride ahead of them.

As we passed by the common folks who had purchased regular tickets, they looked at us with a smirk of contempt.

I could see the children ask their parents:

“Dad, why are those people cutting in line?”

And the tired parents would reply:

“Those people paid extra to be able to cut in line.”

And the children, who had been taught that cutting in line is always wrong, rolled their eyes at us.

These kids learned, the hard way, that even at Universal Studios, there is really no such thing as justice.

Even at the Universal Studios theme park in Hollywood, there is a double standard.

In the Letter of James, the Apostle James knows that there is a double standard in life.

James knows that people who wear gold rings and fine clothes and who have a VIP pass around their neck are told:

“Oh, please go to the head of the line.”

And James knows that the poor, the common folks with baby strollers and fanny packs, will have to wait in line in the hot sun for over an hour just to ride “The Revenge of the Mummy” ride only one time.

James knows that we all use double standards in life:

The rich go to the head of the line.

And the poor wait and wait and wait to receive just a smidgeon of justice.

But James teaches us a radical, new concept:

James writes:

“God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him.”

James tells us that God has chosen the poor of the world to receive VIP passes, as well.

For with God, there is no such thing as a double standard.

There cannot be a treatment of people, by governments or by churches or by individuals, that is based on a two-tiered system and a double standard.

As Christians, we cannot hand out VIP passes to the rich and let the poor

wait and wait and wait in the hot sun.

I watched on TV portions of the PBS show “Frontline,” called “Sick Around the World,” that discusses healthcare around the world. In that TV program, T.R. Reid was interviewed.

T. R. Reid has written a book titled, “The Healing of America.”

As a part of his research, Reid went shopping for some medical attention that he needed on his injured shoulder, so he traveled to many other wealthy countries to compare and contrast the treatment that he would receive.

To do his research, Reid went to the United Kingdom, to France, to Japan, to Canada, and to other countries.

Of course, there are pros and cons to the way that health care is delivered in all countries.

However, my ears perked up when he described his research on the health care system in Canada.

Reid said this:

“Canadians often have to wait to see a specialist or have elective surgery.

Some Canadians respond by crossing the border to buy treatment in the U.S.

But most Canadians accept the delays, because they are roughly equal for everybody.

A scholar [in Canada] put it this way:

““Canadians don't mind waiting in lines, as long as the rich Canadian and the poor Canadian have to wait about the same amount of time.””¹

Now I am not a doctor,

I am not well-versed on the ins and outs of the health insurance industry.

But I am a Christian.

And I have spent my fair share of time in doctor’s offices and in emergency room waiting rooms,

And I believe that I have seen a double standard:

When the children of the rich have an ear infection, they call up their

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/etc/notebook.html>

family doctor and make an appointment for that same day, paying a \$25 co-pay on their way out.

Yet when the children of the poor have an ear infection, the whole family goes and camps out at the emergency room, waiting for hours and hours just to see one doctor.

I realize that you may not share my opinion, but I believe that for me, Jesus does not give me a VIP pass to cut in line. But I believe that I should be willing to wait in the same exact line with both the rich and the poor.

Because the Apostle James asks us, rhetorically:
“Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised?”

Throughout the centuries, we Christians have fought for the dismantling of the two-tiered, double standard systems in society.

For centuries, men had become used to wearing VIP passes and cutting ahead of women in the line toward the voting booth.

Yet we marched with women in the suffrage movement so that women now have the right to vote.

We have stood with our brothers and sisters of color, demanding that two different lines at the water fountain be made illegal.

And now, as Christians, we stand together, both rich and poor, to fight for the dismantling of the double standards in this life.

For all of us have been given a VIP pass.

All of us stand in one line as we wait to approach God’s Table.

All of us, when we were baptized, were sealed with the mark of the cross, a VIP badge that we all wear upon our forehead.

Because everyone, both rich and poor, is a Very Important Person.

AMEN.