

Jesus lived in a society where caste lines were sharply drawn.

1). It was clearly understood that people stayed with their own kind. Good people did not mix with bad people. The rich had little to do with the poor, except to drop an occasional coin into their cups. Righteousness was a matter of “I’m in, your out.”

The better you were, the more you kept with your own, apart from the lower, lesser people. Not something unique to his day, growing up it was the jock/nerds, good looking/homely... On 9-11 fifteen years ago America experienced a great tragedy.

However, from this, we were united; there was one America and no divisions. Sadly, today, we divided, pushed into separation, one pitted against the other.

2). Jesus refused to play that game. To him, people were simply people, and he had room and time for all of them.

3). The Scribes and Pharisees observed, with scornful eyes, the crowd that was gathered around Jesus. Almost all of them were people of doubtful reputation. But in the presence of Jesus, they found acceptance and respect.

*I hope that is what we find at the Cathedral – no one has to be a certain way or belong to something or another. Over the years, we have had many “special parishioners” looked after by our own, seeking them out as Christ would.

4.) Jesus makes no division and seeing this, they thundered back about Jesus: How can a man like this call himself a prophet? He can’t even tell the difference between good people and bad people.

For them, the synagogue was only for the good people and so, they murmured against him saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eat with them.” Well, he continues to do so, in every Eucharist we share. We are the Church of all people, not just good people.

Jesus did not deny doing so, welcoming all people. But he explained it by telling three stories. These stories tell us two things about the inclusiveness of Jesus.

1). First, it is based on his understanding of people. Jesus saw all people as somewhat lost and in need of being found. Some are like coins that have fallen far away from Mass; some are sheep that have wandered in bad places, making wrong choices.

They are like a reckless son who rebelled and ran away from reasonability or like the older son who had lived in anger and lonely isolation. Know anyone like these? Welcome them, seek them, invite them.

For Jesus, people were lost in different ways and different places, diff. degrees, but the fact is, most of us are lost in some way or another, and his desire is to help us find our way.

That's why he could move with such ease across all the dividing lines. To him, those lines did not exist, so he crossed over them as easily as we step over lines in a sidewalk.

One day, he could have dinner in the home of a respected Pharisee named Simon. Another day, he could visit the home of a despised tax collector named Zacchaeus. Both were the same to him, just two of God's lost children.

The only difference was that one of them knew it, and the other did not; always a good idea to take an honest, humble look in the mirror.

The people with whom Jesus confronted – pushed back, building all kinds of barriers designed to shut themselves in and to shut others out.

Some of them were based on gender; men were superior to women. Some were based on race; Jews were superior to Gentiles. And some of them were based on religion; those who carefully kept the law and traditions were superior to those who did not. I'm in and you are out.

The real issue? Like all of us, they did not want to be confronted by reality of how we may be living pushed back, blaming Jesus.

Jesus rejected those barriers and would not acknowledge a single one of them. To him, all of us are loved the same, saint or sinner. No one here has the right to sit in judgment on anyone else, because we are all sinners in need of God's grace.

2). The second thing we know about Jesus' inclusion is that it is based on his understanding of God:

The people of his day saw God as an angry judge, handing out severe punishments, but Jesus presented something much different.

In his mind, God was a woman with broom in hand searching for a lost coin. God was a shepherd with a lost sheep on his shoulders, carrying it back to the fold. God was a forgiving father welcoming a wayward son back home and pleading with another son to come to the party.

That is what Jesus was saying to the Scribes and Pharisees. He was inviting them to the party of divine grace and redemption

1. Sometimes, we make the parable of the Prodigal Son an either/ or story. We make the younger son the good guy and the older son the bad guy.
2. But that is not how Jesus told the story. He pictured the father as reaching out to both of his sons. He cared for the one who came home smelling of cheap wine, and he cared for the one who came from the field with honest sweat on his brow.
3. Perhaps this is the real surprise of the gospel. It does not leave us anyone to scorn or condemn. Jesus has revealed to use the both/ and God. God's grace embraces both Jew and Gentile, male and female, saint and sinner, people of color, first responders, friend and enemy, Patrick and ...

Please, now, insert your name. You are loved by God as God's daughter, God's son. In Jesus, we are one.