

Do you ever wonder if your priorities are in the correct order?

I was sent a delightful story I want to share with you. Morris and his wife Esther went to the state fair every year, and every year Morris would say, 'Esther, I'd like to ride in that helicopter.'

Esther always replied, 'I know Morris, but that helicopter ride is fifty dollars, and fifty dollars is fifty dollars'

One year Esther and Morris went to the fair, and Morris said, 'Esther, I'm 85 years old. If I don't ride that helicopter, I might never get another chance.'

To this, Esther replied, 'Morris that helicopter ride is fifty dollars, and fifty dollars is fifty dollars.'

The pilot overheard the couple and said, 'Folks I'll make you a deal. I'll take the both of you for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say a word, I won't charge you! But if you say one word, it's fifty dollars.' Morris and Esther agreed and up they went.

The pilot put the craft through all kinds of maneuvers, but not a word was heard. Up, down, back and forth, even sideways, he did his daredevil tricks over and over again, but still not a word. When they landed, the pilot turned to Morris and said, 'By golly, I did everything I could to get you to yell out, but you didn't. I'm impressed!'

Morris replied, 'Well, to tell you the truth, I almost said something when Esther fell out, but you know, fifty dollars is fifty dollars!'

I thought it was a cute story, even if Morris and Esther had their priorities mixed up. But they are not alone. It is easy to get our priorities mixed up. It is easy to begin focusing on the wrong things in times of difficulty and challenge.

We live in a time, when news of the economy and fears over our own ability to live in this economy can take over. Those fears can cause us to forget who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. Those fears can cause us to

forget what God is calling us to be about in our world. How are fears over our economy affecting you? How are they affecting your faith?

We are not the first ones to ever have to face a question of priorities and mission. In our scripture for today, Jesus is talking to his followers and to us. He is reminding us that *God wants to work through us to make a difference in this world.*

One of the ways God wants to work through us to make a difference in this world is through our being welcoming and hospitable to others. Our scripture reminds us that when we accept others, we accept God. When we welcome others, we welcome God.

Our scripture is specifically talking about an ancient practice of welcoming traveling preachers. But I believe that we can enlarge this understanding to say that when we welcome anyone seeking God or seeking to draw close to God, we welcome God.

What are ways we can practically welcome people here in the church?

- ✚ We can smile.
- ✚ We can say hi.
- ✚ We can welcome/introduce ourselves.
- ✚ We can invite them to coffee/fellowship.

What are ways we can be unwelcoming?

- ✚ Not smile.
- ✚ Ignore.
- ✚ Tell people they are sitting in our spot.

Our actions, intentional or unintentional can either open people up to the presence of God, or they can close people off from God. Jesus is pretty clear, when we are welcoming and hospitable to others, it helps make a difference for God in this world.

A second way we can make a difference for God in this world is by helping to meet needs that we see. Jesus said it best when he said, *"This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small. Give a cup of cool water to someone who is thirsty, for*

instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice."

Are you willing to help meet needs that you see? Are you willing to start small? Are you willing to make a difference for God? Even now, even in the midst of scary, uncertain economic times?

In the midst of these times, when we are most afraid for our futures, it is tempting to hold on to what we have. It is tempting to hold back from being generous with the gifts we have been given. But if we do that, we are making our decisions based on fear more than faith. Are you willing to live by faith?

If so, it means seeing the needs of people who are hurting around us and offering them help. This is how we make a difference for God. And any one of us can do it.

Tony Campolo is a retired professor from Eastern University in Philadelphia, PA. He tells of a story of a summer program they had at the University that sent College Students into the inner city of Philadelphia to share with others the love that God had for them.

He tells of one young man from the Midwest, who gave up a summer at his parent's farm to work in this program. On his first day knocking on doors, he wasn't too successful at finding anyone home. The first person he found at home was a lady who had a cigarette dangling from her lips while she held a baby who was naked. When she answered the door, she looked at him and said, "What do you want?"

He said, "I want to tell you about how much God loves you." She just looked at him like he had grown a third head, and slammed the door in his face.

He went back down to the curb in front of the building. He put his head in his hands, feeling like such a failure. He was wondering what on earth he was doing this summer in the inner city. He couldn't shake the image of the woman with the cigarette and the naked baby. Then he got an idea.

He went down to the store around the corner. He bought a carton of cigarette's. He bought a package of diapers. He went back to the lady's house. He rang the doorbell and when she answered, he said, "Here. These are for you. Is there anything I can do to help you today."

He spent the rest of the day talking with her, and getting to know her. He held the baby. He changed diapers. He became a friend. At the end of the day, she said, "Why are you doing this? What is going on?"

He said, "I am doing this, because I just want you to know how much God loves you."

She simply said, "Will you pray for me?"

They not only prayed together, but he helped her get connected up to a local church in the area too.

He did what he could. He met a need. And meeting that need allowed him to share the love of God with another. Are you willing to meet needs to share the love of God?

You and I, we are called to make a difference for God with our lives. We do this by being hospitable and welcoming and meeting the needs that we see. May we remain committed to living for Christ. May we continue to live with our priorities in order, even when we live in uncertain times. May we continue to make a difference for God.

In the hope Jesus offers us. Amen.