

Grace and Peace from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The name on the door was Frances McCauley, but she introduced herself to everyone as “Chance.” Whenever I walked down her Hall at the nursing home here I was chaplain, *I would almost always find Chance sitting in her doorway – like a chipmunk in her hole*, never venturing very far, but never letting much get by her either. **“Chance”** kept abreast of what was going on in her small end of the world, and *because she showed and interest in each person, residents and staff alike would stop and fill her in on their lives.*

She talked to everyone, was interested in everyone, and kept tabs on everyone – ***especially the more disabled residents and those unable to speak for themselves.*** She would take the time the nurses didn’t have to figure out what a non-verbal stroke victim really wanted, she would *quietly sneak across or down the hall to sit with sick friends*, and she make at least *one visit a day to the dying or the bedfast just to hold their hands and tell them what was happening* on the hall.

When I read those words “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” ***in this morning’s Gospel Chance McCauley sprang into my mind.***

For decades in Highspire, Pennsylvania, ***Chance welcomed everyone who came into her general store***, taking an interest not only in their business but also in their lives. Country or city, well dressed or poorly dressed, it made no difference – ***she called all of them her people.***

I asked her once ***how she got the name Chance.*** She told me when

people made *a mess of their lives*, when and *everybody was mad at them*, or *nobody wanted to talk to them*, or they just *needed a little food*, they could always go to McCauley's store, and *if Frances was there, they would be welcome in and listen to*. "So they called me "last chance McCauley," which got shortened to just plain Chance." She was mother, confessor, truth teller and friend to generations of troubled young people in Highspire who she referred to as *her "store brats"*. They visited because they knew Chance would stop to take the time and listen to them. *They were glad to see Chance because she was always glad to see them when no one else was.*

Jesus' presents us with *a parable of the Kingdom of God this morning under the guise of a lesson in social etiquette*. Jesus reinterprets our reading from the Proverbs, broadening, stretching, and reapplying Solomon's words on humility to apply to everyone. But He really does a great deal more. *Our Lord presents us with the ethic and lifestyle of all those who desire to live in the Kingdom of God.*

What Jesus suggests – intentionally humbling ourselves and serving those who have no way to repay us – radically differs from our typical human experience where the decisions and the choices we make almost always revolve around how those things will affect us or those close to us.

Jesus speaks as though if we let go of concern for ourselves and put others before ourselves, someone will actually take care to see that we get what we need. How weird is that? Or "If you do the right thing, the right thing will be done for you." Was Jesus really living in the same world we live in?

Let's face it; *we hear plenty of voices saying*, "Live in this manner and you will get into the Kingdom of God." ***Jesus says something radically different***, "Live in this manner and you are in/part of the Kingdom of God."

From our self-centered, self-absorbed world Jesus' words – "when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"— **sounds like utter foolishness.**

Yet that's precisely what Jesus says, and does.

"Do not exalt yourselves, but in humility serve others." It sounds as though Jesus is asking us to lay it all on the line with nothing to base the risk on – Take care of the needy, feed the hungry, see that the sick are cared for and the stranger provided for.

But that's exactly what Jesus does; Isn't it? When the time comes, this one who says "Do not exalt yourself," ***doesn't exalt himself***— though he certainly could have in front of the Sanhedrin, Herod, the soldiers, Pilate, the spitting mocking crowds...

Jesus choses to humble himself so that he might be humiliated – ***being brought from the throne of God to the execution of the most reviled garbage of human existence. Jesus takes the lowest seat.***

Why does Jesus do it? What possible logic could have been going through his mind? ***What good could it possibly do him to allow himself to be humiliated, tortured, and crucified?***

Not one bit. It couldn't possibly do even one little bit for Him, ... but Jesus isn't thinking about himself when he walked down to Jerusalem to die.

He is *thinking about somebody else. And a whole world of somebody elses.*

The first somebody was *His Father, who told him this had to be done; in much the same way Jesus tells us this morning.* And though Jesus has no guarantee that it will do any good, He obeys.

The other somebodies are actually the ones inflicting the pain, passing the judgment, doing the mocking, being indifferent, being betrayers, liars, and deniers. And though Jesus knows that *the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind that constitute humanity are completely self-centered and self-absorbed, He takes the cross for us because in God's Kingdom loving beyond self is the way of life.*

Mother Theresa embodied Jesus' spirit when she said,

"People are generally irrational, unreasonable and selfish. They deserve to be loved, anyway."

So Jesus accepts betrayal, being handed over, accepts humiliation, suffering, a cross, death – for somebody named

And it is finished.

Jesus' body is cleaned, dressed and shrouded, and placed in a tomb.

And it's over.

"and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"— sounds like utter foolishness. But that's exactly happens.

On *the third day*, after all hope according to the law is gone, *the Father and Spirit raise Jesus from the dead – exalting Jesus to a place of*

honor at the right hand of the Father. The kingdom of God prevails.

Chance McCauley lived to be 94, and died a few months before I left Frey Village. *I did her funeral. A funeral luncheon was prepared – a banquet of sorts. It was a reunion of oddballs, misfits, bikers, a few successful sorts of spanning 40 or 50 years, and a whole crowd of just plain folks.*

They sat around long after the food was gone, basking in the memories of McCauley's Store. *The place where Chance lived;* because chance was/is nothing less than hope in a time of need – something we all share in common.

This morning Jesus – our second third, fifth, seventy times seventh chance – comes and *prepares a banquet for us...* for *the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind* – both figuratively and literally. *Humbling himself in with and under these forms of bread and wine Jesus extends mercy to us with the hope that receiving mercy, we might extend mercy as hope or maybe just another chance.*

AMEN !!!