

Year B, July 8, 2018
7 Pentecost (Proper 9)
Christ Church, Mexia

Years ago, "a young American at a banquet found himself seated next to a Chinese diplomat. Not knowing what to say to a Chinese person, the young man pointed to the first course and asked, 'Likee soupee?' The diplomat nodded and smiled. Later, the Chinese diplomat, Wellington Koo, was called on to speak and delivered an eloquent address in flawless English. As he sat down to the sound of applause, he turned to the young American and said, 'Likee speechee?'" (Hodgin, 728)

Stereotypes may allow us to "simplify" our world, but they can lead to problems based upon false assumptions, because they always fail to be totally exhaustive and mutually inclusive categories. In other words, they lack the properties of a true taxonomy. But it isn't just, stereotypes. Other labels, experiences, assumptions, what we think we know about someone can also be problematic. The author Madeleine L'Engle explains it this way: "It seems that more than ever the compulsion today is to identify, to reduce someone to what is on the label. To identify (in this way) is to control, to limit. To love is to call by name, and so open wide the gates..."

Those closest to us sometimes are the ones who have the most trouble seeing beyond who we are (at least in their mind) - our relationships, our past history, our transgressions (each and every one). In fact, because we are so close, we know so much about each other - so much more than others with whom we have not shared intimate details, who may not have seen the real me, for example.

Jesus seems to experience this in the scripture today. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary..." etc. And so, now they cannot accept his seemingly new gifts of preaching and healing. They are offended by him or his new role. We have seen this same type of thing today. In our diocese, for example, a bi-vocational priest is not allowed to return to his home church after being ordained because of the problems that have occurred in the past when this happened.

One of the ways to overcome contempt by familiarity is through forgiveness - real forgiveness and acceptance. Charles Swindoll relates a wonderful story about Tom Landry; those of you who are older may remember this period of time and the incident. Years ago,

the late Ohio State University football coach, Woody Hayes, was fired for striking an opposing player on the sidelines during a football game. The press, even then, had a good time roasting him – virtually tarring and feathering him. Few people in America could have felt lower than him at the time; he not only lost control in a game and did a foolish thing, but he also lost his job and much of the respect that he had accumulated through a very successful career. At the end of that season, a large, prestigious banquet was held for professional athletes. Tom Landry of course was invited. Well, guess who he took with him as his guest? Woody Hayes, the man everyone was being encouraged to hate and to criticize. Landry saw more than this one terrible mistake.

Joni Eareckson Tada writes:

The world has a philosophy that says, 'What can't be cured must be endured.' Christians have philosophy that says, 'What can't be cured can be enjoyed.' And how do we do that? Mostly by accepting others for who they are, rather than who we want them to be or who we have decided they are. It's hard enough to change ourselves; it is impossible to change others. And there is no point in dwelling on the negative. By way of illustration, let's look at a story about John D. Rockefeller, who built the great Standard Oil empire. "Not surprisingly, Rockefeller was a man who demanded high performance from his company executives. One day, one of those executives made a two-million-dollar mistake.

Word of the man's enormous error quickly spread through the executive offices, and the other men began to make themselves scarce. Afraid of Rockefeller's reaction, they didn't even want to cross his path.

One man didn't have any choice, however, since he had an appointment with the boss. So, he straightened his shoulders and tightened his belt and walked into Rockefeller's office.

As he approached the oil monarch's desk, Rockefeller looked up from the piece of paper on which he was writing. 'I guess you've heard about the two-million-

dollar mistake our friend made,' Rockefeller said abruptly. 'Yes,' the executive said, expecting Rockefeller to explode.

'Well, I've been sitting here listing all of our friend's good qualities on this sheet of paper, and I've discovered that in the past he has made us many more times the amount he lost for us today by his one mistake. His good points far outweigh this one human error. So, I think we ought to forgive him, don't you? (Dale Galloway, You Can Win with Love, Swindoll, p. 215)

His good points outweigh his bad, his mistake. ... I think too often when we are mad with someone, when we feel we have been hurt by someone, we tend to look at all his/her bad points and then condemn him or her. Maybe, if we took the time to list all the good points objectively, we would come to a different verdict or view the infraction(s) as somewhat less onerous. Maybe we could learn to accept the bad with the good – to accept the imperfections in each other, the ones that we all have.

Wouldn't it be good if we could overcome our stereotyping, labeling, reducing people to the characteristics by which we define them? How would our lives be different?

In the name of the One God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.