

Adversity and Jesus Politics

Matthew 25:32;42-43

[32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,

[42] for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

[43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

We have a special guest at Wedgewood today who is a dear friend of mine. He also lives in my neighborhood. But most importantly, Mr. Dave Kelly-----Dave would you raise your hand so everyone can identify you?----most importantly, Dave Kelly is the 93-year old who whipped Sam Propst in golf. He shot a 47 and she shot-----well, the last thing I would do is embarrass Sam.

Since I'm in the house of the Lord I guess I had better add that he beat me too. He didn't whip me, though.

I think Dave deserves a round of applause.

If you hang out with Dave, you can learn a thing or two. In golf, for example, he's always telling me to keep my head down. The other week, though, I had the privilege of eating lunch with Dave after playing nine holes with him, and with the current economic crisis in our country I used our time together to ask Dave to give me a firsthand account of what it was like to live during the depression.

Have you ever asked your elders what it was like after the stock market crash?

From Dave I learned how human beings, themselves struggling to make ends meet, helped other individuals out. I heard about how people selling produce and eggs and the like would give such items to people and say, "Pay me when you can." I learned about how doctors would make house calls to folk who couldn't afford medical care and they would say, "Pay me when you can." I learned how some citizens who were hungry would knock on doors and ask if the residents had any food to spare. I learned how when the preacher couldn't be paid someone from the church went around to those who had jobs and said, "Can you give a little more." I learned from Dave how Christians helped the down and out during the depression.

Now there are some who say people facing adversity need to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. And while I don't necessarily agree with all the corollaries of that statement, and while I think there are some situations like mental illness or disabilities or other factors which prevent a person from getting himself or herself out of a deep hole, even liberal me thinks there's something to personal responsibility and accountability.

And as I read the Bible, it is clear to me anyway, that part of what it means to be the Church is to minister to the physical needs of people. So the steeples have their role to play when it comes to lending a helping hand to the down and out.

When it comes to adversity, the person facing that adversity has certain responsibilities and----and churches have certain responsibilities. But none of the above lets any government, whether the U.S. government or any other government, off the hook, at least if you take Jesus seriously and if you give any credence to his words recorded in Matthew 25.

Some scholars disagree with the translation I read just a few minutes ago, but a strong case, a very good case can be made that Matthew 25 has nothing to do with the judgement of individuals but rather has to do with the judgement of nations, as in final judgement of all the world's

governments. That is, I was thirsty and I was naked and I was in prison has to do with the policies and politics of nations.

I'm not going to get into the specifics or the technicalities of this matter because----because even if Matthew 25 should not be translated with the word "nations" you are going to have a hard time convincing me that Jesus, that God, or whatever part of the trinity you prefer, thinks any nation or government has no responsibility to the adversity-stricken. Fat chance that God or the Holy Spirit is giving the United States or Canada or any nation a bye, a pass, a do whatever you want to do when it comes to the poor, the jobless, the impoverished and the healthcare deprived. How could anybody come to that conclusion? And yet there are bonafide, so-called born again Christians who swear up and down that governments have no responsibility, zero responsibility when it comes to those for whom the next day is even a big question mark.

Write this down. All nations are being judged by God.

Can people abuse government aide? Of course. But worst than abusing government help is government indifference, a government's lack of compassionate action.

I love the story of Patty Marshall, a U.S. Senator for Washington. Senator Marshall writes: "I was born and raised in Bothell, Washington, in a big, loving family. I had six brothers and sisters. I was one of the oldest, and we were all very close. My dad ran a five and ten cents store on Main Street, and everyone in the family helped out at the store. We lived in a wonderful rural neighborhood in a big house. Well, actually, it wasn't as big as we needed. Nine people. One bathroom. In fact, the bathroom was at the bottom of the staircase. I can remember every morning all of us were lined up on the stairs waiting for our turn in the bathroom. But we were a close family, and although we did not have a lot, we did not feel deprived in any way. When I was 14 years old, the questions were simple. What kind of car are you going get when you turn 16? When do we get to go shopping? Which college are you going to go to?"

But when I turned 15, things started to change. My dad was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. In a few short years, my dad's illness got so bad that he couldn't work anymore. My mom, who had stayed home to raise her family, had to take care of him. But she also needed to get a job so she could support our family. She got a job, but it wasn't enough to support seven kids and a husband with growing medical bills. So by the time I was 19, the questions were more difficult: How's mom going to work and take care of the younger kids? I wondered: Am I going to be able to stay in college? Or am I going to have to go home, get a job, and help raise my brothers and sisters? My youngest sister had just started kindergarten.

Without warning, our family had fallen on hard times. Now, fortunately for all of us, we live in a country where the government didn't just say "tough luck." It extended a helping hand to us in hard times. For several months, our family relied on food stamps. They were meager, but it kept food on the table while we figured things out. To get a better paying job, my mom needed more training. Fortunately, at the time there was a government program that helped her attend Lake Washington Vocational School where she got a two-year degree in accounting, and eventually, a better job. My twin sister, my older brother and I were able to stay in college through Pell grants and student loans. And all of our family was able to stay in school because we are lucky enough to live in a country that has a public education system. We had the support we needed -- whether it was food, training for a better job or help to pay for college.

It wasn't easy though, especially for my mom. She was going to school, working a part time job, raising seven kids, and taking care of my dad. But we got the help we needed, and it made a difference.

Today, I know that help was the difference between seven kids who might not have graduated from high school or college -- and the seven adults we've grown up to be today: All college graduates, all working

hard and paying taxes, and all contributing back to their communities. Because our government was there to help us through a hard time, today those seven kids are: a firefighter, a lawyer, a computer programmer, a sportswriter, a homemaker, a junior high school teacher, and a United States Senator. [I think] that was a good investment. I don't think that government can or should solve every problem, but when families are having a hard time, a government that extends a helping hand makes all the difference. I know what a difference it makes and I carry that with me every day in the United States Senate.

So says Patty Murray, U.S. Senator from the state of Washington.

I think Jesus in the gospel of Matthew pretty much says the same thing. I think as Christians it is incumbent upon us to keep Jesus' words in our hearts and minds each and every time we enter a voting booth.

I was hungry-----and you gave me no-----food, I was thirsty and you gave me no-----drink, I was a stranger and you did not-----welcome me, naked and you did not-----clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not-----visit me.