

## **“All Committees & No Pray Makes Jack A Dull Boy”**

Luke 22:24-27

Pastor Jeff Wood

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I have a photo album, of sorts. It's in my head. Images I've snapped with my eyes and deliberately saved in my brain. This particular album bears the title, "The Church," and it contains pictures capturing and expressing the nature of the church. In it is this scene and moment.

It is officers' night at FPC, San Antonio, the third Monday of the month. It's a large church with elders and deacons and their separate meetings are preceded by a dinner we all have together. I rush in from a meeting late for dinner as usual. There are a hundred people in the room having dinner. I plunk myself down at one of the round tables in the corner of the room, over by the coffee machines. The table is full save for this one empty seat. I greet everyone and, gobbling my food, I visit with someone on my left. There's conversation and movement at the table and in the room.

At some point the moderator of the session is making announcements from the microphone and eyes turn toward the lectern. I just happen to turn a few minutes later to the quiet gentlemen on my right, Will Morris and Marion McCurdy. All eyes were toward the lectern so they didn't see what I saw to my right. Will and Marion were old men. Very old. Right at 90. Dr. McCurdy had eyes that had worn out quite a bit and Will had among other things a tremor in his arm and hand. They've since that night gone on to heaven. They were a pair.

Sharp minds. But there were bad eyes, a tremor. The snapshot I took, as I noticed them out of the corner of my eye, was of Marion lifting the dinner spoon to Will's lips. One old friend feeding another – each quiet in this, natural, unassuming, reflexive. Right there was the church. Right there was Christian leadership -- for both, the one feeding and the one being fed. Helping, being helped, doing and receiving naturally, personally, with dignity, without fanfare, lovingly.

I would say that these two men are two of the finest men I have ever met. I've wondered what it was that made them so outstanding. It had to do with *their dedication* -- to God, their wives, families, their congregation, and to people through their professions. It had to do with *their constancy* – quiet persistence in a place through the years. It had to do with *their integrity* – no gamesmanship was in them. Finally, the phrase that comes to mind is *their warm humility* – unpretentious, charitable.

But you don't really know them, except through my few words. So to hear the message for us this morning you have to think of the exceptional man or woman in this congregation whom you have known, whom you see and contemplate the way I do Will and Marion. Who?

I am not sure for you but I know for me it is Marion and Will and the message is, “Be like Will Morriss and Marion McCurdy. Be like the one whom I hope you are thinking of.” The rest of what I'm going to say I don't think will alter this point in any way and it may not add much to the point in the end. But let me offer a few other thoughts, again, on leveraging your influence for good, for Christ.

First, connect relationally with others. Think relationally. Don't live isolated. God said to Adam,

“It isn’t good for you to be alone.” Then with Moses he gave Aaron. Later through Jethro he provided an echelon of assistants. When we come to Jesus we find he sent his out two by two. We might remember even that ours is a triune God. Even God in his very nature he is in relationship. Will was Will by himself and Dr. McCurdy was Dr. McCurdy by himself but they were something, something special, and elevated when Dr. McCurdy was feeding Will.

Henri Nouwen has a little book reflecting on Christians leveraging their influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The opening page is cute and serious at the same time. He says, “The first thing that struck me when I came to live in a house with mentally handicapped people was that their liking or disliking me had absolutely nothing to do with any of the many useful things I had done until then. Since nobody could read my books, they could not impress anyone, and since most of them never went to school, my twenty years at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard did not provide a significant introduction. My considerable ecumenical experience proved even less valuable. When I offered some meat to one of the assistants during dinner, one of the handicapped men said to me, ‘Don’t give him meat, he doesn’t eat meat, he’s a Presbyterian.’”

Nouwen made a practice of taking a mentally challenged resident with him when he travelled to lead conferences. He noted, after his considerable years of ministry, that there was more spiritual fruitfulness when he ministered with a member of his group than when he did not. We are better together, whoever we are, however we are. Christians stay humbly connected; they are in relationship.

Second, connect relationally with God.

What is the world hungry for today? You never hear, “What we really need are people who do committees.” You never hear the other and you never hear ball players or street persons or moms today say, “We need people devoted to committees.”

When Peter, after denying Jesus in his time of need, was re-installed as a leader, the question Jesus asked him was not first, “What will you do for me?” Nor, “Who takes you seriously?” Nor, “Do you have what it takes?” The question was, “Do you love me?” We need people who love God. We need true disciples.

An American Indian Chief once visited a church service and afterwards was asked what he thought of it. He said, “Big wind. Lotta dust. No rain.” To lead without being a man or a woman seeking earnestly daily the heart of God is to be wind without rain in a world, in a congregation that really needs it.

Third, connect relationally with others and God as a servant. Jesus, as he had the last supper, maybe even thinking of his words and acts as installation words and acts, said, “Be a servant.” Do not be a power over but be a power under. Release the desire to be somebody in favor of the desire to do something. Release the desire to be noticed for the grateful honor to be of help. Give up proving yourself to others (which is only a way of serving yourself) and show yourself a servant of others. Stop trying to be interesting and be interested.

Here’s a strange phenomenon. When somebody helps us toward our goals or meets our needs, when they are serving us, we go back to them, we elevate them, we value them, we tend to elevate that person to a place of leadership. When our alderman does well by us, we help him or her become

our mayor. When a company effectively serves its customers it becomes, by their response, the market leader. So true service tends to elevate the servant. The service creates power!

However, power corrupts. There's the temptation to have privileges, to get people serving you. I mentioned the pastor in Nigeria last week who, because he treated people very special, found himself the pastor of a large church. But as the pastor of a large church he was given bodyguards and treated like a big shot. Nice. But then that gets in the way of serving. So if service leads to power and power can corrupt, what is there to do?

What there is to do is what Jesus emphasized, for example in his parables of the talents. Namely, to understand that all life is always about serving and reinvestment of serving. Namely, to understand that true life comes from serving rather than being served *and that the power which comes from serving is given, by those following, in the faith that we will use it to serve further*. In other words, we are *always* servants ... it is our identity, our calling, our fulfillment. So it is natural to use the trust and power gotten through serving to nothing other than to serve further.

Herman Hesse tells a story in *Journey to the East* of band of men on a mythical journey. One of the men, Leo, is a servant who does menial chores but relates and cares for them all so well. He sustains them with his spirit. At some point he disappears and the band falls into disarray. Later they arrive at a monastery and are taken in. As they are nourished within, they discover that the head of Order, the head of the monastery is Leo.

Friends, wake up every day be like Leo. Be like Will.

Be like Marion. Be like the person I asked you to think of. Be your special self with Jesus in you and

your life and the world will become more and more  
beautiful and good.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this  
message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray  
with you, the pastors and elders of the church would  
welcome your call. [pastorjeffwood@gmail.com](mailto:pastorjeffwood@gmail.com)  
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