

## **PSALM 145:1-9**

I will extol you, my God and King and bless your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty and on your wondrous words I will meditate.

The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all and his compassion is over all that he has made.

## **MATTHEW 20:29-34**

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Lord, have mercy on

us, Son of David!” The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet, but they shouted even more loudly, “Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!” Jesus stood still and called them, saying “What do you want me to do for you?” They said to him “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

## **I CAN'T REMEMBER**

**Psalm 145:1-9**  
**Matthew 20:29-34**

In 2015, Shiro Oguni opened a pop-up restaurant in Tokyo whose purpose was to raise awareness and celebrate the quirks of living with people who have dementia. He named it the Restaurant of Mistaken Orders. It was featured in NPR's Morning Edition last year. All its servers have been diagnosed with various stages of memory loss and are mostly living in memory care group homes. Oguni's two-fold motivation was first, to give purpose to people who are largely isolated and have basically been removed from society in their declining years; and second, to help society become more caring, understanding and more easy going.

Customers understand going in the door that they may not receive exactly what they order. In fact, the restaurant reports that 37% of the

orders are delivered wrong, and there are instances when the servers simply forget what they are supposed to be doing and sit down at a table to join in the conversation. If you're impatient and get upset about waiting too long for your food, demand that your order be correct and be treated like royalty, then clearly this wouldn't be the place you would choose to dine. And yet, the satisfaction rate of Restaurant with Mistaken Orders is 99%. No matter what happened, the atmosphere promotes relaxed acceptance, overlaid with compassion.

One person who ate there said his experience reminded him of an old folk tale about a woman who carried water home every day from the river using two buckets at either end of a bamboo pole. One bucket was new, the other old, with splintering wood. When she got home, the new bucket was still full, but the old bucket had leaked out half its water. The old bucket felt bad and useless, apologizing to the woman for no longer being able to do its job very well. The woman turned and pointed back to the path she had taken and said to the old bucket, "Do you see all those flowers on your side of the road? Every day you water them. Every day my walk is filled with beauty thanks to you."

Relating to people with dementia can be both interesting and challenging. My wife and I had an experience with that recently. We

went out to dinner at the Piccolo Wine Room in Glendale's Village Square which does not take reservations and only has a small inside dining area. First come, first serve. It's popular with residents because even though the menu is limited, the food is quite good. We entered directly behind an older Glendale couple whom we recognized and were told there was only one table currently available. It seated four and rather than make us wait for another one to open, our acquaintances graciously offered to share the table with us. They were very friendly and as the conversation proceeded, it only took minutes for us to realize that she had advanced dementia. She continually asked us which house we lived in and repeatedly told us they had downsized and moved into a condo and did we know the address. They also ordered a bottle of wine which she was making short work of and the evening gradually became tiresome—especially since the food didn't arrive for over an hour.

Cognitive decline is an issue that worries all of us as we grow older, particularly when we Can't Remember street names or where we put our cell phones or our glasses or why we went down to the basement. Should I be on Prevagen? We pray that it will never be us because we don't want to put our families through this. And we are frankly justifiably concerned about both of our presidential candidates. What happens to the

country—let alone the entire world—if the winner of the election becomes mentally dysfunctional? It's a real concern.

I did not actually intend this sermon to be about dementia—at least not that I remember. It just started out that way and acquired a life of its own. That happens. But the focus, really, is what we learn from our scriptures about God's love and Jesus' compassion. So let's back up.

The first verses of Psalm 145 are a beautiful exaltation of God's greatness: *Great is the Lord and greatly to be praise; his greatness is unsearchable. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever...* And then verse nine articulates the benefits humanity reaps from Divine care: *The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all and his compassion is over all that he has made.*

The episode that Matthew narrates involves a brief encounter of Jesus, who was being accompanied by a large crowd, with two blind men sitting by the side of the road. There is a lot happening here. When the blind men learn it is Jesus who is passing by, they cry out to him for mercy. Why not? But the crowd is clearly annoyed by them and attempts to hush them because they are intruding upon the moment. Jesus' response is interesting. He just stops in his tracks and asks the poor guys what

exactly they want from him. It should have been obvious, but it's like he wanted them to claim it. And when they did, he cured them giving them back their sight...and then they followed him.

Circling back to our own encounters with those suffering from dementia, doesn't the crowd's response to the blind men's plea for Jesus' attention mirror the impatience we often feel in their presence?

Sometimes we come up a little short on compassion. But can't the blind men actually serve as a metaphor for all of us? We all want to be whole and we all wish to be faithful in our discipleship efforts and to live with deep compassion. It is easy to become blind to those who are suffering. And yet, the Spirit will assist in our desire to see and to grow, it cannot cure our blindness until we are ready to accept it. Let us open our eyes and receive our sight!

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