

Humility Lessons

Few things make me as anxious as traveling on planes to other countries. It's not flying that unsettles me, it's mainly because I forget or am not always aware of the little things that can cause big differences in clearly communicating. For instance, in the US when our dates appear on a scheduled reservation we read, month first, day of the month, and year. In Europe the date appears as, the day of the month first, the month, and then the year. This seems like a small difference, but its impact can cause big problems!

In 2019, Andy, Abbey, and I planned a trip to London and Paris to celebrate Abbey's graduation from high school. Abbey had been saving her money, to someday go to Paris, since she was in elementary school and now the time had come to plan. As I planned the trip and looked over the excursions, I asked her, what is the one thing you want to be sure that we do? Her reply was, I don't care what we do, but the one thing I want to be sure to do is tour the Eiffel Tower.

Easy enough I thought and set out to plan our trip. We'd see the Phantom of the Opera in London, then tour the Opera House in Paris. Visit various places in London and Paris and take a night tour of the Eiffel Tower.

On the date that we were to take the night tour, we ate dinner and headed over to the location we were supposed to meet our tour. We waited, but no group assembled. No one was around much at all. We contacted the tour company and they were kind to reschedule, for Tuesday our last day in Paris before flying home on Wednesday.

The day of our tour we made our way to the Eiffel Tower again in plenty of time. We got there thirty minutes before our tour and walked around the grounds taking in the iconic site. About fifteen minutes before the meet-up time, I insisted that we get to the place we were supposed to meet. I checked and double-checked to make sure that we were in the right place. Oddly, no one was gathering as the time ticked by. I read the instructions again, from 01/01/2019 to 01/04/2019 meet at the carousel, all other times meet at the base of the

Eiffel Tower next to the ticket booth. I check for the tenth time, yes, we are next to the ticket booth, just like instructed, but no group was forming and the time was 3:26 and the tour was supposed to leave at 3:30. My heart began pounding and I could feel my hands shaking as I dialed the tour company. I follow the prompts to speak with a representative and by the time I did and explained my situation it was 3:30. She put me on hold to find out the status of the tour group and I felt the anxiety rising from my stomach as I wait for her reply.

“M’am,” she says, “I just spoke with the tour guide and he has already left the meeting area for the Eiffel Tower.”

“How can that be?” I ask, “We are where the instructions say to meet and we’ve seen no one!” I went over my instructions with her and suddenly she understood the problem.

“Oh, I see the misunderstanding, they meet at the carousel until April 1st which is written here 01/04/2019, and the ticket booth after that. I understand how you misread that, but it’s not a problem. The rest of the day today is booked,

but we have three spots tomorrow evening for the night tour like you originally had scheduled.”

“Oh no! We can’t do that,” I reply, “we will be on our flight home tomorrow at 6 am.” Without meaning to be dramatic, I begin crying, well, in full disclosure, I believe it was more like sobbing actually. “Please, please, can you help me find something today? This is the one thing my daughter wanted to do on her senior trip and I’ve messed it up.” Andy and Abbey both look at me with horror as I begin falling apart on the phone.

“M’am, m’am, please don’t cry.” I hear her say gently. “Let me see what I can do.” Andy and Abbey were trying to calm me down. People around me looked at me sympathetically as I shamelessly cried into my cell phone. Soon the lady returned to the line, “M’am, I have the tour guide on the line, he is looking for you all, he has on a black down jacket and a t-shirt with the travel company logo. It’s okay, it’s all going to be okay.” In utter relief I breathe out, “Thank you, thank you so much, I appreciate your help.” She tells me she will

stay on the line until we meet our tour guide. Shortly, we spy a smiling man with a black down jacket and the tour guide shirt, and behind him a group of twenty or so folks. We gratefully join the group and fulfilled Abbey's dream, which I'm sure, in all her imaginings had not included her mom in a full emotional breakdown!

My longing to fulfill my daughter's dream of climbing the Eiffel Tower on the trip, caused me to throw away every hope of having beautifully applied eye makeup for the pictures at the top, I did not care, nor did I care that my tears might make some uncomfortable or diminish my appearance of sanity, I needed help and there was no way I could hold back my emotions in begging for it.

In our story from the gospel today, we meet a woman who knows desperation. Her desire to help her daughter was for a much more serious cause than merely meeting up with a tour of the Eiffel Tower. Her daughter was not well. She was being oppressed by demons and this mom was making herself known.

Before we continue with the story, let's back up just a bit to the beginning of the chapter in Matthew 15. The scene opens with a visit from the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem. They ask Jesus why his disciples don't follow tradition in washing their hands before eating. They are focused on external cleanliness, but rather than answer directly, He asks them why they have broken the command to honor their father and their mother for the sake of tradition. The tradition of the Pharisees permitted them to make a gift to the temple in the amount they would have given toward their parent's care. If they did this, they were under no further obligation to their parents. Of course, this tradition benefited the temple and allowed the pharisees to have the appearance of great piety, but it undermined the intent of the law - to care for parents in their old age.

The intent of the law is always to support the greatest command, which is: love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. The law is **other-focused**, relationally

always calling us to walk in the right relationship with God and each other.

Because this man-made tradition adopted by the Pharisees allowed them to side-step this intention, Jesus calls them hypocrites, which means - someone who puts on a mask to play a part. Behind their pious words and judgment for the disciples failing to wash their hands before they ate, they had no intention of really discovering what God desires. They elevated human customs to the status of divine commands.

Jesus isn't against human tradition, he is against anything that undermines the foundational word of God.

He tells them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said:

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

After that exchange, Jesus calls the people to himself and tries to help them understand the idea of clean and unclean. He instructs them, it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth and from the heart.

Verse 12 stood out to me for the first time, "Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"

The restraint Jesus shows! He simply replies, "Every plant that my Heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone, they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

These words act as foreshadowing for the next part of the story.

"If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (v15)

After Jesus expounds on the true source of uncleanness, evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander, Jesus withdraws to the district of Tyre and Sidon, traditional enemies of Israel, where a Canaanite woman from that region comes to Jesus crying.

Let's pause for a moment and recap what was happening. Jesus moves into enemy territory and immediately encounters a Canaanite woman who recognizes him. We remember Canaan as the pagan land that the Israelites would conquer to live in the land God had promised. This land and this woman are enemies of Israel and yet, the demonstration of what Jesus had just been teaching is about to turn his disciples on their heels.

The Canaanite woman says to Jesus, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."

He doesn't answer her; his disciples come to him and beg him to send her away. "They tell him she is begging after

us.” In some versions, it says, “Send her away for she is loud and annoying.”

But he doesn't send her away, he engages her saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

With that, she moved closer and knelt before him saying, “Lord, help me.”

He answers her saying, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”

She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith. Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

The beauty of this scene overwhelms me. Imagine the scene as it unfolds. The Canaanite woman calls to Jesus using his

Jewish Messianic title, “Son of David,” which the disciples were only beginning to comprehend.

When Jesus tells her that he came for the lost sheep of Israel, she drops to her knees and kneels before him. This action is the response before a king. It’s what the Magi, who were also Gentiles, do upon finding Jesus. She humbles herself, recognizes the authority of Jesus, and pleads for his help. Jesus responds to her, “O woman, great is your faith. Be it done as you desire.”

In that moment her life is changed, not only is her daughter healed, she has an identity with the King. She uses the language with which Jews referred to Gentiles, when she says, “even the dogs eat the crumbs from their master’s table,” but Jesus breaks the barrier of that demeaning term and calls her woman or in other translations, friend. The Canaanite enemy transformed into a friend.

The Canaanite woman doesn’t come seeking to thwart Jesus’s mission to the children of Israel, she asks only for the

crumbs, knowing that even the crumbs would do all that was needed to heal her daughter. She understands what the Pharisees and the disciples completely miss: the source of healing and restoration is in Jesus.

At this point in his ministry, his disciples are still the blind that have been led by the blind. They are the lost sheep of Israel, but in them Jesus sees the hope for the future of the kingdom. The disciples of Jesus will see that he is the good guide that brings sight, heals all of our brokenness, and leads us to life everlasting. And they will be go into all the world to share the good news of a restored relationship with the Father. We are disciples of His today because of their faithfulness.

May we remember that is our calling too, to share the good news of the gospel with the world with humility and grace. Our world needs the healing and restoration of our God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.