

Luke 14:1,7-14
Creekside COB
September 2, 2007

“Fostering Dependence”

Wednesday afternoon I held a thirty-minute old baby. Not just any baby. She was my granddaughter, Katana Leigh. Her tiny head fit into the palm of my hand. I cradled her on my forearm. I gazed at her delicate features-- her soft pink skin, the puckering mouth in search of a meal, the hands, barely the size of nickles squeezing the tip of my fingers. Katana has her mother's blue eyes, her head is covered with hair, and her fingernails need trimmed. And though she can't talk yet, I can tell she has her grandfather's wit.

As I marveled at this little new life, time played a trick on me. It was only yesterday that I was in a chair rocking Lisa, absolutely amazed by the features of her little frame. Time flies like the weaver's shuttle, doesn't it? One generation on the heels of another-- young men and women become parents and in the blink of an eye they are grandparents.

As I left Memorial Hospital I thought about the necessity of the parental protective instinct. When babies are pushed from the womb they are weak, vulnerable, defenseless, and utterly dependent. Everything they need for survival must be provided for them. Little by little they grow. Curiosity compels them to explore their surroundings. They won't stay put any more! They go from milk, to soft, to solid foods. They must be fed, and then learn to feed themselves. They graduate from the bottle to the “sippy” cup to drinking from a glass. They go from *being dressed* to dressing themselves and tying their own shoes. They lie, then roll, then sit, then crawl, then walk, then run, then drive.

It doesn't take long-- just a few sweeps of the weaver's shuttle for our weak, vulnerable, defenseless, utterly dependent babies to turn eighteen and become strong, insular, self-reliant,

independent people-- just like us. This is the way it's done. We teach them to fend for themselves. We don't want our kids to be Mama's boys. We work hard to get them out on their own. The last thing you want is your forty-year old bachelor son moving back into his old room. Independence is the goal.

I've spoken to numerous older people who can no longer care for themselves because of age or illness. They know they need assistance, and their children want to provide it, but the parent protests, "I don't want to be dependent upon my children!" The worse thing that can happen is to be dependent on others.

So what does Jesus have to say about dependence? In today's lesson, Jesus is dining in the home of a Pharisee—one of several times in the gospels where Jesus is invited to dinner. Not being one to pass up an opportunity to teach, Jesus tells a parable about a wedding reception. "Never sit in a place of honor. Someone more important than you may come and you'll have to turn over your seat. Red-faced, you'll sit at the table closest to the exit. You must sit in the cheap seats."

Jesus then turned to his host and said, "When you marry-off your next daughter, don't invite your rich friends to the party. Invite those who live outside the walls of your estate. Give invitations to the poor, the blind, the beggars. Host the people who could never repay you."

It was easy for Jesus to say. He had more in common with those who had nothing. When Jesus came into this world he was a weak, vulnerable, defenseless, utterly dependent newborn who cried when he was hungry and fussed when his diapers had to be changed.

I don't know if you've considered this, but Jesus never outgrew his dependence on others. He had a dependent person. He was homeless. "Foxes have holes and birds have nests," he said, "But I have no where to lay my head." He didn't have a job. It is conjectured that he worked in Joseph's carpenter shop, but there's no mention of it in the gospels. After he began his ministry he didn't work. The disciples all had jobs before Jesus

called them, but there is no evidence that they worked to provide for themselves afterward.

In Luke 10, Jesus appointed seventy people to go ahead of him to the towns and villages that he would visit. He told them, "Carry no purse, no bag, and no sandals." So how did Jesus and company manage with no home, no work, no money, and no food? **THEY BEGGED.**

I know-- it doesn't sound right to call Jesus a beggar. From cover to cover, the Bible underscores the need for hospitality. If a stranger asked for food and shelter, it was given. If you opened your door to someone being pursued, his pursuers could not touch him as long as he stayed under your roof. Hospitality was the cardinal rule of that day. Hospitality was not to be refused.

Jesus could not have conducted his ministry without the help of others. Jesus begged. His disciples begged. The gospels did not mention it because it was assumed. Jesus was depended on God like no other. But he chose to be dependent upon the generosity and hospitality of others as well.

If Jesus tried to do this today I'm afraid he would not do very well. We don't like being approached by beggars. "*Can you spare me some money? I haven't eaten in two days.*" We immediately think, "Likely story. He means he hasn't had any booze or drugs for two days." Jesus might get some change. There are city ordinances prohibiting this kind of thing. Jesus would be cited for panhandling and sent to the mission.

This sounds a little contrived, I know, but how he lived and what he taught calls into question whether our devotion to independence and self-reliance and the assumption that everyone must look out for themselves by themselves is such a good thing.

John Westerhoff is an Episcopal priest who taught education at Duke University. He was asked to visit an Indian school somewhere in the West and assess a problem the teachers were

having with their students. When Westerhoff arrived he sat down with the teachers and asked them to describe the situation. “The Navajo children are chronic cheaters,” they said. “During tests they looked on each other’s papers. They even whisper the answers to each other! How are they supposed to learn anything if they can’t work independently? No matter how hard we try to stop them, they insist on cheating. There’s no hope for them.”

Then, he met with the students to try to understand where they were coming from. “The teachers accuse us of cheating. They won’t listen to us when we tell them we aren’t cheating. In our culture we are taught that when one person knows something the other doesn’t, we should tell them. It’s wrong for those who know to withhold from sharing with those who don’t.”

Which is a better way to learn what matters most in life-- the approach that says, “Figure it out yourself. Don’t expect others to help you,” or the approach that says, “We learn best when we learn together and help each other find our way?”