

Looking to the Interests of Others

A message by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
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In the James Bond film “GoldenEye” the villain’s henchman is a computer genius named Boris. Boris is typing the final code into his keyboard to unleash certain doom upon Bond and company. As Boris hits “Enter” with a flourish he crows, “I am invincible!” ... and at that very moment without warning a ruptured tank of liquid oxygen engulfs him, instantly freezing him into a human icicle. Not so invincible, eh?

On this past Wednesday’s Nightly News I saw a report about tens of thousands of college kids congregating on our southern coast’s beaches as if this spring break were like any other. When asked why he wasn’t heeding the recommendations of the nation’s public health officials, one sunburned young man said, “If I get corona [*sic*], I get corona. At the end of the day I’m not going to let it stop me from partying.”¹

Like Boris the computer genius, “Mr. Sunburn” is convinced that his youthful strength and college-instilled intelligence render him invincible. I pray for his good health, though he seems to feel he doesn’t need my prayers nor anyone else’s.

What he and the other beachgoers don’t seem to realize is that what they do now affects people they’ll never see. By their assortment of close-proximity activities they’re providing an invisible virus so many more opportunities to spread. And even if they themselves don’t get sick, those young people might end up transmitting the illness to their older sister, perhaps, or to her new little baby, or to their grandparent, or to their favorite neighbor whose immune system has been weakened because of the chemotherapy they received.

Whether it’s because they feel invincible or they feel entitled, those Spring Break beachgoers are choosing to ignore the wisdom of experts, and choosing instead to think only of themselves and their enjoyment.

Now, I don’t mean to pick on those college kids. After all, we all know that such self-centered actions are not limited to young people. The grocery hoarding that was so prevalent last week? What that behavior declared was, “I don’t care what you get, as long as I get what I want.”

Self-centered actions are not limited to “those other people,” either. I remember taking our family to a Broadway musical at Playhouse Square maybe 15 or 20 years ago when the boys were still pretty young. We had just gotten back in town and went

¹ NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt, March 18, 2020

straight to the theatre, arriving in the balcony just as the overture was starting. There were other people in front of us, but they were hesitating to approach an usher, not quite sure what to do. So I stepped in front of them, dragging my family behind me and put our tickets in the usher's hand who promptly seated us. Normally I'm an orderly rule-follower, but in that moment I chose to do what I wanted rather than wait for the people in front of me to figure out what to do. To this day I squirm with embarrassment when I remember my selfish action that day.

That's not the way of living Jesus calls us to. One of the gifts of St. Paul was his ability to interpret the teachings of Jesus. In Philippians Chapter 2, verse 4 Paul instructed the Christians in Philippi to emulate Jesus this way: *"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."*²

Our natural inclination is to "look out for Number One" (and if you wonder who that might be, look in a mirror!). But Jesus sought to take us — as different as we are — and form us into a community characterized not by self-centeredness but characterized by caring and compassion for one another and for the world around us. So St. Paul urged, *"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."* Just before writing that Paul said how that can begin to happen: *"...in humility regard others as better than yourselves."*

You know, the conditions we're facing because of this viral pandemic are actually providing us with a proving ground of sorts: each of us has more opportunities than ever to demonstrate the qualities of being a community of caring guided by Jesus Christ.

For instance, we can show extraordinary patience with others — whether in our household or on the roadways or in the store aisles. Let's show more patience than usual because we don't know what emotional stressors they're dealing with.

We can be a community of caring by reassuring others struggling with anxiety, especially in these times of change and uncertainty. You know, God is with us whether the sun shines or the storms blow. Remembering that God is always with us brings calm to our hearts. That calm is God's gift we can share with others. After all, more than 100 times the Bible assures us, "Don't be afraid." Sometimes you may need to say that into a mirror.

Current public health conditions present urgent reasons for each of us to act to safeguard the general public. But we who look to Jesus Christ as our master and guide know that respect for others is something we're called to show always, "in humility regarding others as better than ourselves." Remembering what St. Paul urged, "Let each of us continue to look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others."

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² Philippians 2:4 New Revised Standard Version