

I believe it is in the movie **Postcards from the Edge** that Shirley McClain in the role of the mother of Meryl Streep's character says, "your generation always did insist on instant gratification." Meryl Streep responds, "Instant gratification takes too long."

Scott Peck identifies the capacity to delay gratification as one of the marks of maturity. It has often been commented that Western culture, or especially American culture, demonstrates many characteristics of immaturity, as if we were adolescent. There is an obsession with alcohol, fixation on crude body humor, an over-occupation with anything having to do with sexuality. Personal sacrifice in the moment for something better in the future is a difficult thing to sell. It doesn't tend to get politicians elected to office. As a general rule, as a people, we have a short attention span and not very much patience.

Jesus said, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited...and the host...may come and say to you, "Give this person your place... But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that your host may say to you, "Friend, move up higher; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you."

It is noteworthy I think, that Jesus doesn't condemn the desire for recognition. In a different part of the New Testament, he doesn't criticize James and John for wanting the places of honor in the coming kingdom. The thing is how you get that honor and recognition. "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

And it may take a while. God's time is not our time. It may take a life time. Unlike many, if not most of us, God is patient, and for that we should all be immensely grateful. In fact, recognition may come in ways so unlike what we expected or desired that we miss it altogether.

If you go across the street to the Beacon with the expectation that your contribution of time and energy will be received with gratitude and transformation of life you are likely to be disappointed. There is a lot of gratitude there, but sometimes it's hard to see it through all the obstacles that poverty and mental illness can put between us. If you go looking for the seat of honor in some metaphorical way there's a good chance you will get your feelings hurt.

If you are wanting to see lives changed, families restored, and people caring for themselves in better ways you may need to stay for a while - perhaps a life time. The changes do happen. There is transformation of life and hope is born. But it rarely happens all at once. Sometimes you never get to see it. The life that is changed the most may be your own, but that takes a long time to really see.

Jesus said, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brother or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. And you

will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Don't over literalize it – I don't think Jesus means you should never have a dinner party with friends. And I don't believe he points to a reward discovered only in heaven after this life. That would be inconsistent with everything else he says in the New Testament. It is about opening your heart. It is about reaching out. It is about love and what you can expect it to do. It will change your life. And you may not realize it until it's done.

A few days ago I watched a movie on television - **Up in the Air** with George Clooney. I don't recommend it, but it has been with me since I saw it. It's about a man who travels from place to place to fire people for companies that are downsizing and don't want to do the unpleasant work themselves. He says early on, “I traveled 322 days last year which meant I had to spend 43 miserable days at home.” He has no home, really. He has no relationships and his only goal in life is to accumulate 10 million frequent flyer miles. He has no thought of how he would use them. It's just a goal.

He finds himself with a young employee to mentor, and he is suddenly in a relationship with a woman he met on the road. On something of an impulse he goes to Wisconsin to re-establish a relationship with his sister for her daughter's wedding. He starts to care, maybe even become a little sentimental. He becomes vulnerable.

He offers to walk his niece down the aisle – her father is no longer in the picture. But of course she has made other arrangements. She doesn't really know him. The employee that he is mentoring quits because it really is a terrible job. And he discovers that the woman he has fallen in love with is married.

In a confrontation she tells him that her home is her real life. “I thought you and I signed up for the same thing,” she said. And then she says, “You are a parenthesis in my life.”

As the movie ends he is back on the road, and he says, “When you look up in the air at night and see all the stars, the one blinking and moving across the sky will be me.”

I think it is probably billed as a comedy. It's not; it's a tragedy.

The New Testament says it more succinctly: “As you sow, so shall you reap.” But the payoff isn't instantaneous. It isn't always visible. And it can be too late. You can't be in community without doing community. You can't be loved without opening yourself to the risk of love.

Today is Rally Day, a time when we focus on the mission and the ministry of the Cathedral. It is a time for recruiting the hundreds of volunteers whose time and talent make what we do here possible. It's a time to taste and see.

And maybe it's not for you. Maybe volunteering doesn't fit in with the rest of your life right now. Maybe you support the ministry of this place in other ways. That's okay. One size really doesn't fit all.

But it is a time of invitation. The Christian gospel is a story of invitation. Stop a moment and take a look at your life. Where are you headed? What are you giving yourself to and for? It will shape you in ways that may someday surprise you. What do I want to be when I grow up?

Come up to a higher place. Enter into a deeper relationship with God. That's the real invitation. Enter into a fuller place of love.

Amen.

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