

The Company You Keep

“Hang out with Jesus’ friends.”

James 2:1-5

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Attention

The late '60's: the elevator door in the lobby of a plush Southfield hotel opened. There stood Michael Landon and Lorne Greene, two of the best known television stars of the day. Just a matter of seconds and a crowd filled the room, packing the space in front of the door. Hands were raised, waving. Shrill voices raised above the sudden clamor. They could hardly get out the door.

A lot of good their sunglasses did!

In our world, that's the way it works. The rich and famous draw the attention.

People play up to them, try to engage them in conversation, give them the best seat, make certain they are cared for and made comfortable.

Make a person famous. Put their face on TV or the Internet. Quote them in the paper. Dress them up in a fine suit or a designer dress:

And they are important.

Publicly and personally, they take center stage. The spotlight is on them. You want to treat someone right, showing all respect and care? Do that for the important ones.

Circles and Corners

Another well-known television personality came to worship at a church I once served. Really, he was a genuine person, a faithful Christian, and he had a lot to offer. Members of the church met him, spoke to him, and then came to me and said, “Did you see who's here? This is someone we don't want to let get away.”

It was true. His visit was an opportunity we didn't want to miss.

But what was also true was that, while he was in the spotlight, there were other visitors that weren't given that kind of attention.

There were people who stayed after worship for that church's coffee hour who stood the whole time on the sidelines, Styrofoam cup of coffee in hand, all by themselves. Clusters of friends talked on in their circles and never noticed them. Truth be told, once in a while there were people who visited that church that some members hoped would not come again. They wouldn't fit in.

Some people get the spotlight. Some people are assigned to the corners.

What's the most popular hymn we sing? *Amazing Grace*? How does it go?

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I was once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

The writer of James says that is exactly the nature of our faith. It's all about the way that everybody is a wretch, one way or another. All of us stuck in the corners, in some way away from God, in some way apart from others, in some way even removed from ourselves.

But the amazing grace of God moves into the corners and rescues us from insignificance. Each of us. So our lives are restored to relationship.

Made grace-filled. Out of the corners. Into the spotlight.

Our faith is a matter of knowing that to the point that it makes a difference. God reforms us to be like God: connecting with others and filling their lives with blessing – especially the people who stand in the corners.

That's what church is supposed to be about; and it's what following Jesus does.

A friend and I were talking over coffee one day and he was telling me about how swamped he'd been. He said that for a long while, just about every evening and every day had been scheduled up – especially for work. And all the while, for a long while, he hadn't stopped by his aging parents at all. Of course, that didn't match how he *felt* about them. He said that it especially got to him when he was on the phone with his dad who mentioned his absence in passing.

He said it really struck him when his dad said, "I know. You're busy."

Priorities and demands. We're constantly forced to put a value on people. Are they more important or less important or not important at all? Corners or spotlight: our actions are invariably going to speak louder than words.

Blessing

James makes his inconvenient point. Here we are today: remembering the saints of our lives.

Giving thanks for them.

Honoring them.

Recalling how they revealed the amazing grace of God.

And James reminds us that the some of the saints who should get the most of our attention:

could be the ones who are stuffed in the corners of our lives.

'Time to open their doors

And crowd around.