

“CLASSIC TV AND FAITH:
VII - LEAVE IT TO BEAVER
‘RED AND YELLOW, BLACK AND WHITE . . .’”

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Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 19:1-10

Life has been different this week without the Olympics on television. I don't know about you, but I was glued to the TV for two weeks, watching the action. I don't want to tell you how many nights I stayed up until midnight watching the competition, and then when my alarm went off at 5:30 a.m., turned it back on again. It was so great to watch how well everyone did.

Who will ever forget watching Michael Phelps achieve something no other Olympic athlete has ever done? Or who will forget watching Usain Bolt run - “the fastest man alive”? Or the women's gymnastics team, or the women's soccer team, or the young American diver who shocked the diving world by winning the gold medal? It was all just wonderful.

But you know what I always find really, really inspiring? It's the closing ceremonies. No, not the opening ceremonies, although this year's was exceptional, with the Queen appearing with James Bond and all. But the closing ceremonies are always wonderful for one big reason, in my opinion - that all of the athletes come on to the field in a group - all nations, all athletes, all sports - one great, huge group of humanity. They join together across competitive boundaries, and national boundaries, and ethnic boundaries, and language boundaries - they forget all of that and just revel in joy together at what they've experienced at the Games! It is absolutely wonderful, and I truly believe, in my heart of hearts, that it is a portrait of the coming kingdom of God - where all dwell together in harmony, as one.

In the meantime, however, as we all know, life is not always like that. Diversity, difference, is not always embraced, and in fact, is too often exploited and abused. Which brings me to today's episode of a classic television show, which, by the way, is the last in this sermon series. I hope you've enjoyed it, I know most of you have, and my hope is that it has helped you realize that you don't have to look far at all, sometimes just as far as your television screen, to see God and issues of faith.

At any rate, today's classic television show is "Leave It to Beaver." Leave It to Beaver was a wonderful family show that ran from 1957-1963, and it centered around the Cleaver family - husband Ward, wife June, and their sons Wally and Theodore, better known as "The Beaver." They lived in what was then, in the late 50's, early 60's, a typical neighborhood, and they were a typical family. The father went out of the house to work each day, the mother kept the house and tended the family (and in the case of June Cleaver, always with a dress on and pearls around her neck!) Wally and Beaver each had close friends - Beaver's were Larry Mondello and Whitey, and Wally's were Lumpy Rutherford, and the infamous Eddie Haskell. Now, if you've never seen "Leave It to Beaver" you've got to know a little something about Eddie Haskell - he was the classic "kiss-up" and the classic trouble maker. If something was brewing, you can bet Eddie was a part of it.

So - today's episode is called "Beaver and Chuey." Chuey is a new friend of Beaver's. He met him at school and spent a lot of time at Chuey's house, so one day June tells Beaver she and Ward would like to meet him, so she invites Chuey to come over to their house to play.

Watch the screen and see what happens.

Clip One - 00:35 - 4:15 (Chuey comes over, and when Ward and June meet him they discover he's from South America and doesn't speak English.)

It amazed Ward and June and Chuey's mother that Beaver and Chuey got along so well and understood each other so well despite the language barrier. So at this point, everything looks good. Well, not so fast, because here's what happened next.

Beaver and Chuey, after playing a while in Beaver's room, decide to go out to the garage where Wally and Eddie Haskell are repairing Wally's bike. Eddie, as usual, finds the little kids irritating, and tries to show what a big man he is. He had already bragged to the Cleavers that he knew Spanish, so Wally encouraged Eddie to talk to Chuey. Now, Eddie's back is up against the wall, because, of course, he has wildly exaggerated his fluency in Spanish, so he mumbles a few words to Chuey and is totally flummoxed when Chuey starts talking back to him. In order to cover up the fact that he doesn't understand Chuey, he turns all macho and tells the little kids to "scram" and leave them alone.

So Beaver and Chuey leave, but no, that's not enough for Eddie. Because now he's irritated that he was caught in a fib about his Spanish, he decides to pull a trick on the boys. He goes in, calls Beaver out of the bedroom where he's playing with Chuey, and tutors him on words to say to Chuey in Spanish. He tells Beaver that what he will say is "You're real swell, Chuey," but in reality, the words mean,

“You have the face of a pig!”

Poor sweet, innocent Beaver goes back into the room, all excited to speak to Chuey in Spanish, and proceeds, instead to insult him, after which Chuey runs out of the house crying his eyes out.

Beaver has no idea what happened, nor do his parents, and then, without warning, there comes a ring of the doorbell, and it's Chuey's parents, also wanting to know why their son came home in tears. After struggling to communicate with each other, the parents call Beaver down into the conversation, and it comes out finally that Beaver has called Chuey a pig - which sets Chuey's parents off in a fit of anger, and they storm out of the house - before even letting the Cleavers know what the actual words in Spanish meant!

To make a long story a little shorter, in a discussion with Wally, Ward learns what actually happened - that Eddie has set Beaver up as a joke, and that Beaver had called Chuey a pig. So Ward sets off to try and fix the situation, by getting out his old high school Spanish textbook and writing a letter of apology.

Now, before we see what happens, I want us to spend a little time together talking about dealing with people who are different from us. Because I believe Beaver's story has much to tell us, but more importantly, Jesus' life and words have so much to say to us as well.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is dealing with someone who is different. Oh, he's not different because of nationality, or language, but he is different because of the work he does, and the life he lives.

His name is Zaccheus, and he is a tax collector, and he is not a good person, and everybody knows it. He is a tax collector, who had no sympathy for anyone's plight - he made people pay no matter what. And not only that, he found a way to line his own pockets in the process. So he was becoming a wealthy man and a man without a conscience.

And then, along comes Jesus. Something must have been stirring up inside Zaccheus, maybe a bit of conscience, because he was moved to go and see this Jesus he'd heard so much about it. Jesus was passing by, and since Zaccheus was short of stature, he climbed a tree to be able to see, and truth be told, it would be a great place to hide out and just check Jesus out without being spotted.

No luck, because not only did Jesus spot Zaccheus, he also went right over to him, and called him down. Jesus knew about Zaccheus, and he had eyes so he could see what the crowd thought of him, that he was not a well-liked man. He knew that Zaccheus was a man of questionable character - but none of that mattered, because, first for Jesus, Zaccheus was a child of God. Plain and simple.

And every child of God is worthy of care and concern, is worthy of a Savior.

So he stopped and talked to him, and even went to Zaccheus' house for dinner, which infuriated the crowd, because shouldn't he be going to the homes of the "good" people? But Jesus went there anyway. He spent time with this "different" man and He changed His life. From that moment on, Zaccheus was a new person, giving instead of taking, loving instead of judging. And all because Jesus cared about him - looked past the differences.

What are we to learn from these stories - from Jesus and Zaccheus, and Beaver and Chuey? Well, several things I think -

First, that one of the greatest gifts of God's creation is diversity. God created everyone unique, in his or her own way. He filled the world with different shades, and genders, and talents, and languages. And He called them all good. And, as the little childrens' song goes, "Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in God's sight." How boring the world would be if we all looked alike, and spoke alike, and thought alike.

Instead, we are a wonderful conglomeration of everything good from the hands of God. And, if we just begin to look at our diversity that way - that it is a good thing, instead of a source of division. No one has to be better than anyone else. No one's color has to be better, or nation has to be better, or anything else for that matter has to be better. We are all uniquely created by God, diverse and wonderful in God's sight.

If, indeed, we would begin to embrace the beauty of the diversity of God's creation, problems such as the one that occurred in today's television clip would cease to occur. There wouldn't be animosity, or jealousy. There wouldn't be misconceptions and rushes to judgement. Remember how Eddie Haskell commented that Chuey's family was stuck up because they never said anything - well, of course, they never said anything - they couldn't speak English. But his interpretation, the word he was spreading with abandon was that they were stuck up.

Oh, the walls we put up between us and others out of ignorance. Christ calls us to something better - to live a better way - embracing diversity rather than using it as a source of division. He calls us to value every single person for who they are - precious children of God.

And secondly, I think Christ challenges us to do even more than that, not just value each person, but actively seek to find things that we have in common, and care through those things. Beaver and Chuey may not have spoken the same language, but they were both kids just wanting to have a good time in life. And the

Cleavers and Chuey's parents didn't speak the same language, but they both dearly loved and cared for their sons - they had that in common.

Jesus looked at Zaccheus, and as he heard the scorn of the people deriding Him for spending time with Zaccheus, and grieved over the fact that Zaccheus, was, indeed, just like all of them - a sinner standing in the need of grace. Oh, if they could have remembered that, they might not so quickly have condemned Jesus for reaching out to him.

When we begin to look at those who are different from us as the wonderful persons they are, we will also begin to see how much we have in common. All of us want to be loved. All of us want to feel like we matter. All of us love our families and friends. None of us wants to fail. We have so much in common, and I believe Jesus implores us to remember that, and come together in that.

Ask anyone who went on the mission trip, and they could tell you about that. From all outward appearances, the people of Kentucky with whom they were in mission looked a lot different from them. Their houses were in disrepair, their clothes might have been worn, their accents surely different. But I'll bet it took about two seconds for them to realize that they had more in common than they did things that were different.

And anyone who has worked with the Rotating Homeless Shelter could tell you the same thing. The fact that the people with whom they were ministering are homeless is a big difference, but other than that, they want the same things as do you and I - the love of family and friends, work, a home in which to live, a place to matter. We're not so different after all.

And the young people who will start school this week, will discover, sometimes painfully, that everyone there is in the same boat. Oh, some kids will appear stuck up, and some will try to be the most popular, and others will be categorized as geeks - but eventually, they'll realize that they're all alike. It might take years, but they'll come to realize that they've got a lot in common - they all want to be liked, they all want to matter, they all want someone to care about them.

Friends, all of us - no matter who we are, what we look like, where we're from, how we speak - all of us, are one in the Lord. We share a common humanity, and Jesus' greatest desire is that we embrace our diversity, celebrate our differences, and reach out to one another in love.

Let's turn back to the screen now, to see how this saga with Beaver and Chuey ends.

Friends, there are a lot of fences that need to be mended in our world today. A good way to start is by remembering that, different though we are, we are all

created by God, and are one in Him. May we, like Jesus with Zaccheus, and
Beaver with Chuey, reach out and care for those who are different, but the same -
and yes, even the Eddie Haskells of the world! May it be so.

Amen.