

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Sep 19th 2013

Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both.

“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

It is such a human tendency to rank and compare. As a university we hope for high rankings and publicize our top ratings compared to other universities. We celebrate high rankings of our sports teams. The hospital promotes a top tier rating. As professors we regularly must rate and rank students and face teaching score rankings ourselves.

The readings today insert a Jesus-focused perspective on rankings. The letter from Timothy reminds us not to take a ranking by someone else to heart to our detriment. Stay vigilant, set a good example, keep teaching and learning. The letter from Timothy also includes an essential discipline for staying focused and vigilant in trying times – remembering the gifts you have been given by your faith community and your loving God. The letter from Timothy also reminds us that using these gifts and persisting despite how others may rate us, not only saves us, but also saves others around us. We inspire one another. The scriptures repeatedly remind us to encourage one another. We need encouragement and inspiration from one another. We need to remind each other of our gifts and of the teaching to love one another and love and serve God above all else.

In the gospel story, Jesus reminds Simon that all of us are indebted to God more than we could repay on our own. All of us, regardless of how esteemed or how reviled we are by others, have access to mercy. We all fail and we all need mercy. We so easily fall into a pattern of recognizing and commenting on failures – failures of others and our own failures. I too easily fall into a pattern of continually reciting to myself and to others undone task after undone task. I rate myself and rate others on completing tasks and bemoan the failures evident in so many undone tasks. I can get so wrapped up in this focus on these failures that the more important priority of caring for others gets ignored, much like Simon who appears to have ignored basic hospitality care for Jesus. Worry and focus on failures narrows our vision and our ability to use our gifts to their full effect.

Jesus calls us to mercy and gratitude that expresses itself in care, teaching, and encouragement. We have all been forgiven more than we can ever repay. Can we be extravagant today in our gratitude for mercy, love, and gifts that we have experienced? Can we pour out that gratitude in love and encouragement to one another?

Sue Crawford