

A car races past you on I-5, you watch it weave at high speeds in and out of traffic, you hope there is someone up ahead who will catch and give a ticket. We want them punished for their reckless driving. Or, you have done a good job, you have met your deadline, accomplished your goals, maybe even exceeded what was required. You want someone to notice what you have done, give you a pat on the back, acknowledge the work you have put into the project. Is this selfish thinking? Of course, when we speed or mess up we hope no one is around to notice!

The news recently has focused on a possible rice shortage (side note: International Ministries and One Great Hour of Sharing designated \$100,000.00 to food shortages around the world). One of the reasons for the possible shortage: people are buying rice and hoarding it, just in case there is a shortage. This we know is selfish thinking. Do we trust God to provide our daily bread?

As Esther's story continues we find the King having a sleepless night. He needs something to read and has the annals of the history of his kingdom brought and read to him. As he reads the history he is reminded of Mordecai's saving his life. Mordecai exposed a plot to have him killed; a foreigner saves the life of the King. This is something that rarely happens. He wonders if he has done anything to thank Mordecai for this. Now, there is no indication that Mordecai expected anything in return. He was just doing what he deemed his duty and also protecting Esther.

Tomorrow is Memorial Day: A day when we pause to remember those who in "just doing their duty" gave their utmost for God and country. We often call them heroes and justly so. But, for most of them they would respond that they were only "doing their duty" expecting nothing in return. They were doing what they needed to do for the hour at hand.

The King decides that he must do something to thank Mordecai for saving his life. His chief advisor, Haman, comes in the following morning and the King poses this question: "*What should be done for the man the King wishes to honor?*" Now, Haman has already had the gallows built for Mordecai—75 feet high (if the rope breaks the fall will kill him!). He cannot wait for the day to come when he will get rid of the Jews. And, of course, the king wishes to honor Haman. Who else would he be honoring? Haman tells the King what he would like done to him. "Here is what I would do if I were King." This sounds good to the King. An elaborate display of the King's best, only on the one who the King honors: selfish thinking!

Can you imagine the look on Haman's face? "Go and do this for Mordecai." Talk about a turn of events. Haman has been invited to a private dinner with the King and Queen. He is at the top of his game. He is "king of the mountain". Now he has to lead Mordecai around the city with Mordecai dressed in the king's finest and riding the best horse in the land. And he has to shout, "*This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor*" (6:9b). Would he have chosen such an honor had he known the honor was for Mordecai?

Now the story concludes with Haman's plot to kill all the Jews being revealed and Haman ends up being hanged on the gallows that he had had built for Mordecai. The feast of Purim is inaugurated in celebration of God's deliverance of the people of God.

Our call is to serve others—unselfish thinking. Our call is to think more about others than ourselves. However, we need to acknowledge that we live in a selfish world. Some recent examples are: the leaders of Myanmar selling rice on the world market that could be used to feed those in the cyclone devastated areas, because of the high price they can get for the rice. Or, the excessive profits of US oil companies. In the presidential elections campaign people are looking for a candidate that will do something for "me". Even in the

church people are seeking congregations that will do something for them, what is in it for me? (The Seattle Times yesterday had an article entitled “Church Shopping 101”.)

Now all of us are guilty of having “me” days. “Me” days are not always bad. We need some time to get away to be alone for a while. A day or two when we recharge our batteries and the like. The danger is when everyday becomes a “me” day. When we are more concerned about ourselves than we are about others. Haman’s downfall was having all “me” days.

I wonder why Haman hated the Jews so much. Was it selfishness? I believe it was because he saw only them as different. They did not do things the way he expected things should be done. He did not see what they contributed to the daily life of the nation. He only saw that they were different, worshipped a different deity and had a strange diet. His thinking was selfish. Unfortunately this is how many in our day see others. We see only that others are not like us and we fail to see the contributions they make to the world around us.

A movie a year or two ago (I’m not remembering the name) dealt with what would happen if one day we woke up and all the immigrants were taken from the land. Now, the movie mistakenly assumed that we (Caucasians) were not immigrants. As the movie opens lawns are not being mowed, coffee is not being made, doughnuts are not frying, there are no waiters/waitresses to serve and so on. Suddenly people are being confronted with all the contributions these people were making to our daily lives. However, it was only after the contributions were taken away that the realization came of contributions that were being made. When we fail to see the contributions of others, who may be different, we are into selfish thinking.

Christ came to demonstrate that all people are equal in God’s sight. God sees us as equals, all created in the very image of God and all people for whom Christ died. He saw the positive aspects and contributions of all people, even though, some like Judas, let him down. He opened the doors to many who were previously outside the kingdom of God. He opened the doors for slaves, for women, for Gentiles, for you and me. We must never forget that at one time we were on the outside looking in.

We must not forget that, when we see others seeking their place along side of us. As we remember those who died for our nation we cannot forget that many of those who served and who gave the ultimate sacrifice were from the outside. I have encountered hundreds of men and women in the Philippines who count it a privilege that they were able to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. They wear it as a badge of honor as proudly as any American. Were it not for many of them, who knows what our future would have been.

Whenever we begin to exclude people from the Table of Christ we enter into a selfish mode of thinking. God’s invitation is open to anyone who is willing to come and join him. God has prepared the best for all. Remember, Jesus turned the water into the best wine! God is not selfish with love, grace and forgiveness.

We need to get rid of our selfish thinking lest we too become like Haman. We must get rid of our selfish thinking and become more and more like Christ especially, when we consider those who gave their lives that we might be here today. Let’s look not only at those that are like us but at those that the writer of Hebrews calls “a great cloud of witnesses”. Men and women from all over the world who gave, that we might know the love, forgiveness and grace of our God. To paraphrase the writers of Hebrews: ***We are surrounded by such a cloud of unselfish witnesses.*** Can we afford to be any less than they were?