

THE SNEETCHES
JULY 7 AND 8, 2018
Matthew 15: 21-28; Ephesians 2: 11-22

The Sneetches are such silly creatures, aren't they? Two groups of yellow bird-like creatures -- some have little green stars on their bellies. Some don't. The star-bellied Sneetches believe that star makes them the best Sneetches on the beaches. They live an enjoyable life, but they don't let the plain-bellied sneetches join in the fun.

Enter Sylvester McMonkey McBean. He has just the contraption that will solve all the problems of the plain-bellied Sneetches. For just \$3 they can enter his machine and exit with green stars on thars.

It's just a momentary victory for the plain-bellied sneetches as Sylvester offers his contraption for only \$10 to the star-bellied sneetches to have their stars removed. Chaos ensues.

The Sneetches get so caught up in adding or removing their stars that eventually even they can't keep track of who is who.

It would be easy to dismiss the Sneetches as silly, superficial creatures if we didn't see ourselves so clearly in them. Once again, Dr. Seuss offers us a mirror and invites us to hold it up to ourselves.

What smacked me in the face is the very simple admission that we are so persuadable. We can be persuaded, every day, by people who profit from stirring pots of conflict, distrust, misinformation, half-truths, fear, and anxiety. It sells.

There will always be people who seize the opportunity to sell or deal whatever it takes to keep people divided. And the profiteers of division are counting on us to remain naïve ... when we really are capable of learning.

The Gospel text for today is a difficult Scripture – puzzling at its best and disturbing at worst. It ended up being quite a learning experience for those who travelled with Jesus as they entered Tyre and Sidon, Gentile regions that Jews would have considered unclean.

A woman from that vicinity comes to Jesus. Now, first, by the social custom of the day she's not to speak to a man in public. Second she's a Canaanite and not Jewish. There's a lot of history between the Canaanites and Israelites, differences more serious than stars. And the two mixed together about as well as the two kinds of Sneetches.

But neither being a woman or Canaanite stopped her from doing everything she could to get Jesus' attention. Her daughter was suffering with demons and she wanted his help. At first Jesus doesn't respond to her at all. His disciples want to send her away. But she continued to plead with Jesus who, when he does finally answer, does so seemingly with indignation. He basically says, "I came to

help my people only. I was only sent to my people of Israel.”

When she persists, Jesus explains that it’s not fair to take the children’s food and feed it to the dogs. In another words, the good stuff is meant for the people of Israel not her kind of people. Any way you look at it, it’s a disturbing response.

But the next question the Canaanite woman presents to Jesus isn’t too different from the Plain-Belly Sneetches: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” In other words, can’t the good stuff be for us too? Can we, who are not “your” people get in on it, too?

That kind of question can be tough on the ones who are already “in on it” -- who already feel entitled to the good stuff. The people of Israel were the ones God had chosen as God’s people and the ones to whom Jesus had been sent. Of course the good stuff was for them.

The woman wants healing for her daughter, but she knows God can do it through Jesus, and she won’t take no for an answer, no matter WHO her people are. She knows God is so powerful that she doesn’t even need a place at the table for a whole meal of the good stuff. Even the crumbs that fall on the floor would be enough.

Yes, it was quite a learning experience that day. Jesus made God’s healing power available to one whom others

would never dream worthy to receive the good stuff. The good stuff – and by the good stuff I mean healing, a relationship with God, forgiveness and salvation – the good stuff -- was going to be for everyone.

In the reading from Ephesians, there are more issues that are dividing and stirring up strife between the Gentile and the Jewish followers of Jesus. Paul writes to both sides that Jesus tore down the barrier that divides Gentile and Jew. “Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything”.

Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, Christ came and preached peace to outsiders and insiders. He created a fresh start for everybody.

Earlier in Ephesians 4, Paul had a word for those who like to stir things up that cause or maintain division. He writes: Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Scripture has a lot to say about divisions and those who cause divisions. It’s just a reminder to me that God’s people are more than capable of learning, but we’re more often than not, pretty slow at it.

Humans are very good at creating division. Throughout history we’ve been good at keeping star-bellies and plain-

bellies separated. But, of course, we're still having a bit of trouble agreeing on exactly who gets stars and who doesn't.

Is the star for skin color? For being born in the right place? For the right language? For the most popular or most likely to succeed? Is the star for the one who thinks the right way or believes the right thing? Is the star for the correct height and weight and education and attire?

How easy it is to laugh about silly Sneetches and then cautiously check the mirror to see if we have a star or resign ourselves to knowing we will never have one.

In the end, Sylvester McMonkey McBean leaves the Sneetches, his pockets properly lined from playing upon the desires of one group to be out and the other group to be in. He arrogantly thinks they're naïve and can't learn. But all by themselves, without any coercion, the Sneetches stopped making stars so important; and they just recognized they were all just Sneetches on beaches, able to get along and become friends.

Maybe we're not always as smart as Sneetches. But, as the body of Christ, equipped with truth and love, we have the responsibility to make sure no one is looked down upon, no one is less than. No one.

We come to the table of grace today not as insiders, or outsiders, but as God's beloved children. We are getting the bread on top of the table, not the crumbs off the floor. So,

when you receive the bread, do you know the power of what you hold in your hand? The bread is a gift of grace that says God has not overlooked you. No matter what your gender, race, ethnicity, or any other human boundary that divides, God still searches your innermost thoughts and loves you.

When we eat this bread we are accepting this gift of God's love and we believe that it will heal our life just as surely as the Canaanite woman's daughter was healed.

And if this bread heals your life, who else might it feed? Do we give other people crumbs when we should be inviting them to the same table where we get our spiritual bread and sustenance?

God's banquet table is abundant, and OPEN – open to all – there is enough for you and more than enough to invite others.

We need to find ways to let others know: Hey, this good stuff that Jesus offers? It's for me and you... for everyone ... and thank be to God, no one is excluded.