

## Wesley United Methodist Church

September 6, 2015

"Come Empty..."

James 2:1-17

There's an old story about two crows sitting on the handles of an old plow on the edge of a field next to a county road. An old pick-up comes bouncing down the road. The pick-up is just coming back from town and the bed of the truck is filled with a month's worth of groceries. As it gets alongside the two crows sitting on the handle of the plow, something bounces out of the back of the truck.

Crows being crows, they both fly down to see what it is. After some discussion and some tasting they decide that it's edible. One of the crows even recognizes it. It's one of those long tubes of unsliced bologna. They both go at it. They eat about half of that tube of bologna and the first crow gets full. He flies back to the plow handle to sun himself and clean up after eating.

The second crow grabs the remaining half of bologna and flies back to the plow handle, too. Once there, he continues to gorge himself on the bologna. You know how salty bologna can be? Well, while the second crow is devouring the bologna, the first crow decides he needs a drink of water to wash that saltiness out of his mouth and flies off to get a drink.

When he gets back, the second crow is still eating. The second crow keeps eating until the bologna is all gone. Now he's stuffed to the gills with bologna. He's so full his feathers won't even lay flat. And he's thirsty, so he decides to fly off and get a drink. He pushes off and flaps his wings but no sooner does he go about four feet when the weight of all he's eaten sends him crashing helplessly to the ground... and dies.

The moral of the story is simple: "Don't fly off the handle when you're full of bologna."

I know that's bad but what can I say, because in one sense, in a roundabout sort of way, that's exactly what James says in a portion of his letter. Read James 2:1-17

Passing judgment on others is for the birds. And we're full of bologna when we do pass judgment. In the Kingdom of God, outward appearance doesn't matter.

There is an old nursery rhyme that I heard years ago and I found several variations of it. This is the one that comes close to the one I heard.

Rich man, Poor man, Beggar man, Thief. Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief.

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Gentleman, Ploughboy, Merchant, Chief.

We might look upon each of those trades or jobs differently, but God looks at the individual, not their job or their outward appearance. James confronts us about being too full of bologna, and about being too full of ourselves.

This morning is Communion Sunday. Christ Jesus invites us to his table, where there is no distinction. Christ Jesus invites us to an All You Can Eat Buffet of God's Grace. And the only thing we're asked is to COME EMPTY, so we can LEAVE FILLED. We can't come to this table if we come full.

Full of ourselves. Full of prejudices. Full of hate. Full of anger at a brother or boss or spouse or children.

Full of answers. Full of judgmentalism. We have to come empty. We have to come hungry and needy. We have to come seeking, not satisfied. If we're full there is no room for God's grace, love and forgiveness. So we have to empty our heart and soul of all those things that might keep us from feasting at this All You Can Eat Buffet of Grace and Forgiveness. And the good news is when we come empty we will leave filled.

In an old mission church in London, England, which was located in the slums of the city, all the members come together on the first Sunday of the year and they all kneel at the altar rail together for Holy Communion. It just so happened that on that particular Sunday the pastor saw a judge of the Supreme Court kneel next to a former burglar. The same judge had sent that burglar to jail where he served for seven years. After his release this burglar had been converted and became a strong Christian and Christian worker. As they knelt beside each other, the judge and the former convict, neither one seemed to be aware of the other.

After the service, the judge was walking home with the pastor and said to the pastor, "Did you notice who was kneeling beside me at the communion rail this morning?" The pastor replied, "Yes, but I didn't know that you noticed." The two walked along in silence for a few more moments, and then the judge said, "What a miracle of grace." The pastor nodded in agreement, "Yes, what a marvelous miracle of grace." And then the judge turned and asked: "But to whom do you refer?" "Why, to the conversion of the convict." The judge said, "But I wasn't referring to him. I was thinking of myself." The pastor was surprised and replied, "You were thinking of yourself? I don't understand."

The judge explained. "It did not cost that burglar much to get converted when he came out of jail. He had nothing but a history of crime behind him and when he saw Jesus as his Savior he knew there was salvation and hope and joy

for him. And he knew how much he needed that help. But look at me. I was taught from earliest infancy to live as a gentleman; that my word was to be my bond; that I was to say my prayers, go to church, take communion and so on. I went through Oxford, took my degrees, was called to the bar and eventually became a judge. Pastor, nothing but the grace of God could have caused me to admit that I was a sinner on a level with that burglar. It took much more grace to forgive me for all my pride and self-deception, to get me to admit that I was no better in the eyes of God than that convict that I had sent to prison." That judge understood completely what it means to come empty so you can be filled.

When we come empty, we bring only ourselves, which is the best and greatest gift we can ever give to God. It's the only gift God ever asks for. And it's the gift God gave to us through Jesus.

When we come empty, with just the gift of ourselves, God meets us and feeds us and fills us to overflowing.

It doesn't make any difference whether we're a Rich man, Poor man, Beggar man, or Thief, when we come empty, we leave filled.

So, empty yourself this morning. If you're full of bologna or not, empty yourself of all that might separate you from God. Come empty to this All You Can Eat Buffet of Grace and Forgiveness and leave filled. Amen.