

SMART PHONES

Sermon for Pentecost20C—Lk 17:5-10

LPC, 10/6/13

Who here owns a smart phone? What do you do with a smart phone? Make phone calls, obviously. Take pictures and videos. Send text messages. That's not so much. I can do that much with my own bottom-of-the-line stupid phone. What does a smart phone do beyond that? Access the internet, download apps, do banking, make purchases, play games, watch movies, communicate and store data and documents. Smart phones do a lot.

If you own a smart phone, think about it a minute. If you don't own one, suppose you own one. Answer me this: how long do you expect to use your current device? Will you still have it in ten years? In five? In one? Chances are, if you have the typical two-year service agreement, you can expect to be using your current smart phone for the next couple of years max. Then what? Will you get another with the exact same specs or will you trade up?

Even if you want another with the exact same specs, you probably will have to trade up, since the trend is so overwhelming for "improvements." Personally, I'd prefer a cell phone that simply sends and receives phone calls, but I can't seem to get one that doesn't want to manage my entire life, even at the bottom of the line.

So, most of us will be getting a more powerful phone when we trade in our current phones. Some of us will even seek a more powerful phone. A few will even rush out to buy the next generation of power phones as soon as it hits the market. You might settle for a new phone with the same power as your current phone if it delivers the same power in a really convenient or cute package.

Let's switch gears now. What is a smart phone without a network? What if you own a powerful device but it doesn't connect to the cloud or a satellite or a mainframe or the internet? I asked my son the computer guy this question and he told me, "Without the network, a smart phone is a \$600 paperweight." In other words, the smart phone's power lies only in its ability to access the network.

Now, let's paraphrase today's Gospel lesson using the smart phone metaphor.

The apostles said to the Lord, "Give us more powerful smart phones." The Lord replied, "If your current phones were connected to the right Network you would have access to hydroponic technology and be able to grow mulberry trees in the sea."

Let me be clearer. We're like smart phones. God is like the Network. Without God, our Network, we are just expensive paperweights. However, when our connection to the Network is good and strong, we have access to all the gigantic power of the Network, with its global reach and its limitless information.

There's more good news. Not only do we have access to the incalculably huge power of the Network (God), accessing the Network is exactly what we are made for. Just as a smart phone is designed to plug into the network, human beings are designed to plug into God.

I think that this, in a way, is what Jesus means in his enigmatic reference to servants and master. A master does not fawn all over his servant and grant the servant special favors for merely fulfilling a servant's normal duties. We're not particularly surprised or overjoyed when our smart phones connect to the internet... after the first couple of times anyway. We might be particularly frustrated or angry when our smart phones *don't* connect to the internet, but when they function as they ought to, they're only doing what they've been made for. In the same way, when we humans connect to the source of our power, we are not exhibiting any particular virtue, we are doing what we are made for.

Now human beings have a perverse streak that electronics do not. We insist on plugging into things that are not our true network. I'm not sure I can press the electronic device analogy much further, but suppose it were possible to access something other than the network from your smart phone.

I seem to remember there used to be a science experiment where you could pick up a radio signal or electronic current from some wire and two potatoes. Do you remember this? Okay, I know this is maybe a long shot, but imagine you could keep your smart phone going for a time by plugging it into a couple of potatoes. This might work for a while but sooner or later the potatoes would rot and your smart phone might be a bit worse for the wear.

That's what happens with human beings when we plug into the wrong network for our power. Wrong networks include things like money, sex, influence over others or any other finite power. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with these things, just like there's nothing intrinsically wrong with potatoes. It's just that in the long run, they'll rot and your smart phone will be the worse for the wear.

Don't be a stupid phone. Be a smart phone. Access the God app, and watch the mulberry trees transplant.