

Along the track

Entitlement

Some years ago overseas, one of my dining companions complained that her chips were cold. The waiter told her quite forcefully that 'you can't always have hot chips.'

I guess we can't always have what we want. Last Christmas my little granddaughter was convinced that Santa would bring her a magic unicorn that would grant her (and our) every wish. It took some adept footwork to convince her that such a creature did not exist. You can't always have hot chips.

Sometimes we are told 'you can be whatever you want.' That is true. And it isn't. If we mean that we can have any career, profession or job we want, we will be disappointed. That doesn't mean we can't have ambitions or dreams of what we might be and do, but finding direction and purpose in life needs a touch of realism. That involves coming to understand where our emerging skills and talents are leading us, what we are good at, where our strengths lie, taking note of what we love doing and where we find satisfaction. Then we become more aware not only of who we are, but who we're not. The attitude that you can be whatever you want can set us up for disappointments, unrealistic expectations, bitterness.

On the other hand, we can choose to be the person we really want to be. We have all been gifted in our own way, we all have talents and abilities that make us who we are. I visited a school once where there was a sign in the foyer that said:

You were made for a purpose. Find out who you are and become it.

Finding out who you are takes time but if we are open to that journey, it can be rewarding and fulfilling. The attitude that often skuttles that journey is a sense of entitlement. We have probably all experienced it in some way, in the person who pushes in, in attitudes like I deserve this job, I deserve special treatment because I am special, why should I have to wait? Such a sense of entitlement can be the cause of things like road rage, violence or antagonism in places like hospitals, even bullying. Feeling entitled like that can grow to attitudes like only these types of people are entitled to live in our country, in our neighbourhood, a big step but that sort of divisive attitude doesn't come out of the blue - in the words of the song, from little things big things grow.

There is a brief scene in Matthew's Gospel where the mother of James and John comes to Jesus with a request, not a surprising request from the mother who loved her sons and wanted to see them 'get on' as it were.

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.

"What is it you want?" he asked

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. Matt 20 20 - 24

The mother had quite a different idea of what the kingdom meant, what it would look like. You don't know what you are asking, Jesus said to her, you don't understand what this kingdom will be. It was not a kingdom of power and prestige with all the trappings of office. It was quite the opposite, a kingdom where the service of others was more important than being served, a kingdom where forgiveness and generosity to others was central, where power lay in how love was found in the everyday treatment of others, where the needs of others were important, not just mine.

Sometimes we have to look again at what is important to us, what is important in how we treat each other, what we expect of others. If we replace respect and kindness with a sense of our own entitlement, if gratitude is not part of our everyday life, if we prioritize our own needs over those of others then we are well on the way to feeling that we are entitled where others are not. If we find ourselves blaming others more often than not, it may be time to ask ourselves why. Everyone has feelings and struggles of their own. Just stopping for a moment, taking time to be a listener can make us more compassionate, more sensitive to the needs of others, not just our own.

In the words of the late Pope Francis: "No one can grow if he does not accept his smallness."

Perhaps we might put it this way: You can't always have hot chips.

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au