

Last week I ate lunch at a bakery restaurant (Paradise Bakery) where you order and pay and then find a place to sit and eat. As I paid the young lady, she asked me if I was a motivational speaker. I have never been asked that question before, and I was taken back by her question. I responded by asking why she would think I was a motivational speaker (I guess most of us in pastoral ministry are in some sense). She responded that I had used her name several times in our short conversation and this was strange for most people. "Only people who are seriously interested in motivating others do that," she added.

I responded by telling her that she was obviously alert and observant to know that I had used her name (I again affirmed her). I then said simply that she was important to God and therefore important to me. I can still remember her name, Erin.

As I finished me meal, I was overwhelmed by this person's insight into behavior and underwhelmed by most other people. How do you treat people who are incidental to your life or mission? By this I mean the garbage collectors, the wait staff, the check out personnel at your grocery store, the guy who changes your oil, or cleans the floors where you drink your coffee. I was so disappointed to hear Erin say that only people who are concerned about motivation affirm her through the use of her first name.

In John 1 we read these verses about Jesus recruiting Nathanael to follow him:

⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." ⁴⁸"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you. ⁴⁹Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." ⁵⁰Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."

Notice how Jesus actually shows Nathanael his significance by knowing something about him. Jesus had paid close attention to where Nathanael was standing and what he was doing before Philip had approached him. Jesus was a master at knowing the small details in a person's life that would imply that this person was significant. Nathanael was very impressed and Jesus simply tells him, "if you think that is impressive, follow me and you will see real miracles..."

Are you willing to pay attention to people in a way (like Jesus did here) that implies they are important? Every person I meet is "fearfully and wonderfully made." Every person has something to teach me, if I will simply put myself in a position to learn. If I will value them more than I value myself, then I can learn from them. For me that starts with remembering their name.

I have had to intentionally work on remembering peoples' names. It involves pneumonics and any other trick I can use to associate that name with that person. I do use their name three times in the conversation before I walk away. It isn't wooden; it

actually helps to imprint their name. And if they are important enough, I should be willing to do this. Jesus paid attention to such details, why shouldn't we?

At least it impressed Erin in Indianapolis. I don't think she was ready to follow me as Nathanael was to Jesus. But, she knew I thought she was a person of value and that God looks at her in the same way. Let me encourage you to treat everyone with such respect, by knowing and using their name. Even if you will never see them again, you never know what seeds you plant another follower of Christ may reap.

Remembering their name is the first step in a journey of valuing people...next week we will talk about some of the next steps...