

Last week I told you how a cashier thought I was a motivational speaker simply because I used her name in the midst of the conversation. This week I want to tell you about the several ladies who work behind the bread counter at my local grocery store (Publix). Let me first share my bias, I love Publix fresh baked bread! So I buy a loaf every week from the bakery. As I talked about last week, I know the names of the four workers behind the counter, Cyd, Celine, Mallory, and Monica. This really isn't a big deal since I talk with at least one of them at least once a week.

But, I don't think Jesus is really concerned about us just knowing names, he is concerned about life-change as we saw last week with Nathanael (John 1.47ff). So once you know their names, the goal is to know them! Jesus states that within Nathanael there was no deceit (guile). It appears that Jesus knew this because he had divine insight. Though we don't have such powers, we can know a lot more than most of us give credit for.

When I began to talk about my bread with one of these four women, I began to simply get to know them. As they got to know me, I would ask them questions about their weekends or schedules or the kind of bread they favored. But as time progressed, I found out where they lived, their relationships and each of these women really opened up honest dialogue. There was never anything inappropriate in these conversations and I always allowed them to take the conversations to a deeper level.

Once one of them asked me the health benefits and detriments of caffeine. I had just before that googled that information (ironic or divine?) and was able to completely fill them in on the details. I asked her why she would ask me that question and she said that as a doctor, I should know that information. Obviously, I asked her why she thought I was a doctor and she said because I was interested in the staff and was knowledgeable about whatever they were interested in. I assured her I was not a medical doctor and she asked if I was another kind of doctor to which I said yes, and left it at that.

I always look at the countenance or listen closely to the language of these women; are they tired, concerned, worried, frustrated, or jubilant? As I closely pay attention to them I have been able to ask them questions related to what I see in their eyes or face. Quite often they will tell me long stories. One time, when I asked a simple question, the answer didn't match what I saw in her face. I challenged her about what I perceived and she broke down crying. She went on to ask me about death and dying. We had a great conversation (she is Hindu/New Age). I didn't share the four spiritual laws, but I did tell her I would pray with her over the death of a close friend and she said she would appreciate it.

It starts with knowing a person's name, but redemptive relationships continue to develop through paying attention to the little things in a person's life. Does their countenance match their words? Is there something that is happening in their life that you can celebrate?

I no longer believe in chance encounters. I believe that we can make every encounter a divine one if we pay attention to them. I fully appreciate that we don't have time to do this as we have large churches to run, or appointments to make...Jesus did. I wholeheartedly believe that we cannot be leaders if our walk doesn't match our talk. Don't tell me you are a missional leader because you lead a missional church. First let me see it in your life, and then let me see it in your leadership.

The scriptures have a lot to say about "the least of these". It is more than giving food, it is about giving them dignity. God has clearly called us to lead missionally. That means that we must practice living missionally first and then developing the skills to lead accordingly.