

Bragging Rights?
Psalm 30
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

At Cub Scout day camp a little over a week ago, the boys were invited to package up a raw egg for what they called the annual egg drop. Using whatever they wanted to, the boys were to package up an egg in a container no larger than six inches by six inches to protect the egg from breaking. Rather than drop the eggs, however, the camp leaders decided to make the egg drop fit better with the camp theme of western cowboys. So they rigged up an old truck to a flatbed trailer filled with hay bails. The boys then tied their egg packages to a string that was attached to the back of the flatbed trailer. The boys loaded onto the hay bails for a hay ride while the eggs were drug behind first on the gravel road, and then on the pavement. If their egg broke, then well, they lost out. But if their egg survived then they earned “bragging rights.”

As I explained the egg game to the boys, Clay wanted further clarification as to what he would get if his egg did not break. I then proceeded to explain what it meant to have bragging rights. After the explanation, Clay looked at me and said, “Mom, it’s not right to brag. That’s not very nice.” Right on, Clay!

Bragging isn’t very nice. Nor is it humble in any way. And yet we still do it and seem to think we have the right to do it! Even the disciples of Jesus seemed to think they had bragging rights since they were for him and not against him. Here in Luke, we find Jesus sending out seventy persons out into the villages to preach the coming of the kingdom of God. Again we have to remind ourselves that the time had come for Jesus to face his unjust condemnation and crucifixion. He and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem for the last time. There was no going back now. The kingdom of God was at hand and the time had come for people to either be with Jesus or against him.

So he tells all who will listen to go out into the surrounding villages on the way to Jerusalem and preach that the kingdom of God was near. He sent out seventy with these instructions:

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. When you go to a house greet the owner with peace. If peace is returned to you then stay there and accept what they give you. Eat what is given to you, cure those there that are ill, and tell them about the kingdom of God being near. If you are not welcome in a town, then go into the streets and say, “Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”

We then read that the seventy return with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” But Jesus responds, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

The disciples were so excited with the power they found in Jesus that they were ecstatic about the abilities they now had. They were so delighted that they could not help but brag about their accomplishments over their enemy. So prideful about it that they could not contain their delight! It reminds me of the lyrics of a country song that recently came out. The song is called, "Pray for You." And it is sung by Jaron and the Long Road to Love. It goes like this:

I haven't been to church since I don't remember when
 Things were going great til they fell apart again
 So I listened to the preacher as he told me what to do
 He said you can't go hatin' others who have done wrong to you
 Sometimes we get angry but we must not condemn
 Let the good Lord do his job, you just pray for them

I pray your brakes go out runnin' down a hill
 I pray a flower pot falls from a window sill
 And knocks you in the head like I'd like to
 I pray your birthday comes and nobody calls
 I pray you're flyin' high when your engine stalls
 I pray all your dreams never come true
 Just know wherever you are, honey, I pray for you

I'm really glad I found my way to church
 Cause I'm already feelin' better and I thank God for the words
 Yeah, I'm gonna take the high road and do what the preacher told me to do
 You keep messin' up, and I'll keep prayin' for you

I pray your tire goes out at 110
 I pray you pass out drunk with your best friend
 And wake up with his and her tattoos

I pray your brakes go out runnin' down a hill
 I pray a flower pot falls from a window sill
 And knocks you in the head like I'd like to
 I pray your birthday comes and nobody calls
 I pray you're flyin' high when your engine stalls
 I pray all your dreams never come true
 Just know wherever you are, near or far
 In your house or in your car
 Wherever you are, honey, I pray for you
 I pray for you

As funny as the song is, it is a good reminder that God really doesn't want us to gloat in the misery of others. Jesus responded to the disciples by reminding them that even though they have power through him over evil, they are not to rejoice in the misery of others. Although it may feel good that the unjust get what we think they deserve, we are not to rejoice in the misfortune of others—or even wish it upon others. The only thing we should rejoice over is the fact that God loves us and that we are God's children.

As disciples of Jesus, we too are sent out to proclaim God's good news of salvation. And when things go great, we should not brag about them. Rather the only thing we should rejoice over is the fact that we are God's children who are loved and free. No one really has the "right" to brag, and bragging only leads to prideful self-centeredness. So, take the words of Jesus to heart and rejoice over your name being in the book of heaven and not over the misfortune of others. Amen.

Prayer:

Gracious God,
Give us humble and thankful hearts. Help us to recognize and value the love and grace you have for us and squash our desire to brag at the expense of others misery. In Jesus name we pray.
Amen.