

Another...

(The one where Chris and Jeff eat a salad)

Psalm 146

Jeff Carr and Chris Zepp, with Ben Neher
BWCOB, August 12, 2018

Ben silently shows Chris to his seat at a table set for a meal during the end of the hymn.

While the scripture is read, he reads from his book while waiting at the table.

Shortly after the hymn ends, Jeff enters.

Throughout, Ben serves drinks, takes food order, etc as usual for a waiter.

Jeff: Hey...I see you are eating alone...would you like some company? (*Sits down*) You see it's funny...because... you preached about introverts eating alone a few weeks ago.

Chris: Ha ha – yes, very funny. Especially after all those nights together in Cincinnati surrounded by all those pillows, and I just let you sleep! You see...it's funny because I preached about how I didn't smother you with a pillow in your sleep when we were roommates at Annual Conference. ...

Jeff: Good times ☺ Anyway, sorry I'm late...I almost forgot about our meeting today. Still haven't gotten used to the new schedule with you taking Tuesdays off now.

Chris: Well, we did have a nice run going there. After almost 9 straight years of meeting almost every Tuesday for lunch...it'll take a while to get used to the new pattern.

Jeff: Wow – has it really been that long?

Chris: Yep – by my calculations, I figure we've had over 350 Tuesday lunch meetings since you came on board back in 2010.

Jeff: No way!

Chris: Yep.

Jeff: Whew...when you put it like that I suddenly feel pretty old.

Chris: At least you aren't staring down the big 4-0 like I am.

Jeff: Too true!

Chris: So...what is on the agenda for today?

Jeff ticks off a variety of updates and announcements, including:

- *Jubilee Circle cancelled*
- *Game Night*
- *Personal updates and prayer concerns as appropriate*

Chris adds a few of his own:

- *Wednesday Night practices and meals*
 - *Kids music practices*
 - *Meals starting back up – Pizza!*
 - *Shannon partnering to organize*
 - *Volunteers needed*
- *Worship Leaders*
- *Volunteer section of the website...Phones!*
- *Book study – Forbearance book*

Tim Kreps shows up at some point to add his updates about the garden.

Additional banter and conversational flow in the moment...

Chris: Sooo...the big thing on my agenda – worship – Sunday.

Jeff: Ok, shoot.

Chris: Hey, that reminds me – you get any offers to hit the range with anyone after your sermon the other week.

Jeff: Oh yeah – lots of offers. Still haven't done it yet though.

Chris: Well you better get on that – otherwise, we're all going to come to the conclusion that you didn't really mean it!

Jeff: Don't worry – the day will come. But back to the topic at hand...you were saying about Sunday...

Chris: Yeah – well, it's Welcome Back Sunday, and I'm kinda stuck on what to do for worship.

Jeff: OK...say more...

Chris: Well, you know how we've often tried to do something different on Welcome Back Sunday, you know? Something outside of our usual patterns – something distinctive and out of the ordinary...

Jeff: Like "Fun with Flags?"

Chris: Exactly! Or remember when Kelsey Murray was still a BC student and was working on her senior art project, and the scripture was the Jeremiah text about the potters house, and we had her throwing clay up in the baptistry during the whole service, and I did my meditation in rhyme?

Jeff: Oh yeah, that one was pretty memorable! Still think of that one every time we find one of our chairs that still bear the marks of the splattered clay!

Chris: Or even last year when we showed that video with all those people from all over the world singing "Love is All you Need."

Jeff: Yeah...the Starbucks project...good stuff. Which reminds me – we should stop at the new Starbucks on the way home. I'm currently nursing an addiction...

Chris: Far be it from me to get in the way of a man and his overpriced iced tea! But seriously...I can't think of what to do for Welcome Back Sunday this year.

Jeff: What're scriptures for that day?

Chris: Lectionary isn't really much help this week...at least not for what I think we want to do. There's a decent text from James, but you know James...really preachy, pretty heavy. Not the mood we're going for. And the gospel text could have been fun – the sassy Syrophoenician woman is always good for a laugh. But Hope just preached on that story this summer while we were at Conference.

Jeff: Good stuff too from what I hear. By the way, she's going to be at Bethany that weekend, right?

Chris: Yep...fall classes are just getting started at the seminary just like everywhere else. And she's got an onsite. I sure don't miss those crazy days of driving back and forth from Indiana!

Jeff: So what about the other scriptures...you tend to be more of an Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures guy anyway...

Chris: Well, there's four of them to choose from, but I'm not really wild about any of them. I guess if I was going to go with any of them, I guess it would be Psalm 146.

Jeff: You're going to have to help me out...believe it or not, I haven't memorized the Psalms yet 😊

Chris: It's just another praise Psalm. One of the Hallel's...

Jeff: Ummm....

Chris: You know...the "Tehillim." One of the the "Hallelujah" Psalms that end the psalter.

Jeff: I'm not the Bible guy...

Chris: The 5th book of the psalms...numbers 146-150. They're often called the "Hallelujah" or "Alleluia" Psalms, since they all begin and end with *Hallelu-Yah*... you know, "Praise the Lord!"

Jeff: Well, that sounds pretty good. Why not go with that?

Chris: Because it's just another praise Psalm. I'm not really seeing anything special or significant in it. It's just "Praise God, Praise God always. God is good, God's the best. Praise God." Ok for a Sunday School song, but nothing profound... nothing that preaches, you know...

Jeff: (*Thoughtful*)...Hmmm...

Chris: OK, out with it. You scare me when you get contemplative.

Jeff: (*slowly*) Do you think we should keep having these lunch meetings?

Chris: (*confused*) What?

Jeff: Just answer the question. Are they helpful? Good for us?

Chris: Well, yeah, of course. Otherwise we wouldn't have been doing it for nine years.

Jeff: What about next week? Think we should have a lunch meeting next week?

Chris: Yes! Why not?

Jeff: Well, it's just that after – what did you say earlier? – like 350 of these weekly meetings, next week will be just another weekly meeting...just another lunch together. Nothing significant or profound. Maybe we could just skip it. Do something different...

Chris: (*realization dawning*)

Jeff: See what I did there?

Chris: Just another staff meeting. Just another praise Psalm...

Jeff: Just another Welcome Back Sunday.

Chris: Just another year as a family of faith....

Jeff: Just another year in ministry together...

Chris: Another...that's not a bad thing.

Jeff: Not all! It is something to be deeply grateful for. To have another year to share life together... growing in faith and serving together ...sharing the love of God...

Chris: That *is* something to be thankful for – to give God praise for.

Jeff: If only you could find a good praise Psalm to use...

Chris: Touché. So we'll go with Psalm 146 for Welcome Back Sunday. Still need to figure out a direction for the sermon. I need something a bit more than "Praise God!"

Jeff: (*Beat*) Here's an idea – what about a dialogue sermon?

Chris: That could work...we've been talking about it for years. So what would we focus our dialogue on? What does it mean to praise? What we are thankful for?

Jeff: Maybe we should look at the Psalm again...

Chris: I don't know. I've spent some time with it already, and I didn't really see anything compelling. And I'm not so sure that this is the weekend for scriptural exegesis.

Jeff: (*feigned surprise*) I never thought I'd hear those words coming from you!

Chris: Well, there is a time for everything. And I think you are right – this is the time to praise God for another year together...a time to remember all that has come before, celebrate just being together again, and look forward to what God has in store for us in the year to come.

Jeff: I think that could be really cool. So how do we do a dialogue about that?

Both are lost in thought for a moment...

Chris: What if we just had a conversation like this on Sunday morning?

Jeff: You mean...just talk...in front of everyone.

Chris: Why not? We could set up chairs and just talk things out like we so often do. HEY – maybe we could even get a table and do like...a meeting just like this. We could even eat together. After all, it's what we do.

Jeff: I don't know...should we really eat in front of everyone? It'll be picnic Sunday...wouldn't want to be THAT guy...

Chris: We'll just have to make it something blah – like...a salad. No one gets jealous of a salad!

Jeff: OK, sounds like a plan.

Chris: Awesome! Well then, here's to another praise Psalm and another welcome back Sunday!

Jeff: And to another year together in ministry – Cheers!

Chris: Ah, ah - Praise the Lord!

Benediction

Diana Butler Bass has just released this wonderful book on gratitude called *Grateful*. I heartily recommend it, and on this Sunday when we celebrate another year on the road of life in community and following Jesus together, I want to share her concluding words as our benediction:

To know the mystery of life is to be grateful in all things. *In* all things, *with* all things, *through* all things....I invite you to the journey...to find yourself part of a like-spirited community. You are not alone. There are many on the road. [so]

Give thanks.

Live in gratitude.

There is a place for you at the table.¹

¹ *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*. (2018) p. 194.