

Paraklēsis : Collaboration

There exists an essay – well known in a small circle of economists – titled “I, Pencil” that illustrates the ability of a free market to produce a product that could not be made by any single entity. The story takes the reader through the numerous steps, materials, innovations and the ingenuity necessary to make a simple pencil. Sure, there are pencil factories that produce pencils, but even after all the development needed to bring a pencil design to a manufacturable state, the raw materials needed to put all the pieces together are themselves developed products. The graphite, paint, brass, rubber and even the wood are commodities that need to be produced. All these elements are produced for use in various products, not just pencils. (Graphite is also used as a lubricant and for sliding electrical contacts.) To exemplify his point, the author, Leonard Read, considers the workers that pick the coffee beans that the lumberjacks drink... Surely, one can argue that the coffee harvesters have little to do with making a pencil, but the point is well made. That is **there are a myriad of contributors to any given product** that we take for granted every day.

Here is an excerpt from the essay... keep in mind that the essay is written from the perspective of the pencil: “I, Pencil, am a complex combination of miracles: a tree, zinc, copper, graphite, and so on. But to these miracles which manifest themselves in Nature an even more extraordinary miracle has been added: the configuration of creative human energies—millions of tiny know-hows configuring naturally and spontaneously in response to human necessity and desire and **in the absence of any human masterminding!** Since only God can make a tree, I insist that only God could make me. Man can no more direct these millions of know-hows to bring me into being than he can put molecules together to create a tree.”

You should know that this essay is a 1950’s commentary on economic free trade... But, the author talks of the “Invisible Hand” that guides mankind to create things. It makes me think of a colony of ants. Ants seem to be able to create and maintain a complex colony with both physical and societal infrastructure without “being told what to do.” Well, maybe it’s that “Invisible Hand” tells them what to do.

Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, Prepares her food in the summer And gathers her provision in the harvest. (Proverbs 6:6-8)

It is common for us to get on our knees and ask God for guidance, but do we ever consider the guidance that we get that we don’t ask for – that which comes to us without our asking. Indeed, I imagine there is guidance from God that is given to us in groups or even as The Church, His bride as a whole. But, that is not my intended topic; I present it to provoke thought.

Last month I talked about humanity and the refugee crisis. My thoughts were on the things that I can do about it. My list was very short and not very impactful to the overall situation. Not surprising... But, that did not prevent me from feeling inadequate. I was thinking on Matthew 25 “Truly I say to you, **to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.**” And asking “what can I do for any of these hurting souls in Venezuela or Syria?” Here is an answer that I found:

Be content with what you have and what you are accomplishing - The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (Philippians 4:9-11)

There is an objective that we are given here in this life and we need to not lose sight of it. Compassion for refugees (for example) and the desire to ease their suffering is not the objective I was given and focusing on that is a **distraction from my goal**. Of course, I am not saying that I should not have compassion for or a desire to help them, only that it should not be my objective.

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)

My Foremost Objective is to Love God, trust in Him, obey Him, follow Him, imitate Him – with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. When we all do that, we will have made ourselves ready to be the Bride of Christ. We will be one body that He goes into.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (1 Corinthians 12:14-18)

I could sell my alabaster jar of nard for money to give to the poor, or I could use it to anoint my Savior. Messiah told the disciples "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me." (Matthew 26:11) Do you think this scripture applies to us? I am thinking that **God can create bread from stones** – how much nard would you need to sell to provide that kind of abundance?

If I take several steps back from my situation, I see myself whining – "why can't I help these people?" But, I am learning that my task is not necessarily to help "these people" directly. My job is to do my small, **seemingly insignificant, but entirely essential** part in the bigger picture. We need to focus on the job that God gives us and trust that the small part we play is working toward His victory.

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men (Colossians 3:23)

Focus on the Objective – Love God.

Be content with what you have and what you are accomplishing.

Recognize your Gift and use it. "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7)

I could say that we are all working together to make a pencil. That would be a clever way to tie all of this letter together, but it's better than that! The folks working their insignificant yet essential tasks to produce a pencil likely do not know what the final product will be. We, on the other hand, know through our faith that the culmination of our efforts will prevail over evil. We are battling in a spiritual warfare and our victory will result in eternal life. Yes, we're making more than a pencil.

Just remember that your part is essential.

Peace to you and glory to God,

Nate

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