

God and the Interview—23rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
The Rev. Ian Burch
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I remember sitting in the office of an older priest fifteen years ago, getting more and more nervous over the course of a 45-minute conversation. I was interviewing to be his intern, and I could tell from the onset that he was absolutely unimpressed. I sat there and told him about my excellent grades, my extra curricular activities. I told him that I had studied religion, languages, history and music. I even told him I had been the commencement speaker at my college graduation. The more I talked, the more quiet he became. He started to look bored. I could tell that he was not at all buying what I was selling.

At one point, at the very end of the interview, he said, how do you think this interview is going. I told him honestly, "This is going terribly." I went home and had a beer, convinced that I had blown the interview. Imagine my surprise when I ended up getting the internship. Later, the priest told me that the reason he gave me the position is that I was honest about just how bad the interview was. He had no interest in my achievements. He wondered if I was able to assess and to learn. He wanted to work with someone who could be real.

This is hard to hear sometimes. I think that the world invites us to move through it selling our best selves at the top of our lungs. I think the world preferences lies about how perfect everything is. I think it preferences places where we are not authentic about our struggles, our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities. That kind of perfectionism leads to isolation, loneliness and a warped view of what life looks like. That kind of perfectionism makes the soul sick.

But that's what I had learned. Many of us learn that we are to present ourselves as perfect, or strong, or beautiful or smart. It's not that these are not good things to be. It's that no one is only these things. Going into that interview at the ripe old age of 22, I just listed all my accomplishments, expecting to have them rewarded. And instead, I learned that this wise priest didn't want the glossy, perfect version of me. He wanted the real me. Warts and all.

It's hard for God to work through us when we are busy listening our own accomplishments. It's hard for God to speak through us when our mouth is occupied tooting our own horns. Instead, God desires all of us. The real us. Good. Bad. Ugly.

The tax collector in the Gospel story today, came before God and said, Here I am. A sinner. Take all of me. Use all of me. In the story, it is the Pharisee who comes to God full of bluster. Full of self-aggrandizement. And Jesus tells us that the tax collector chose the better path.

There is no IQ test or credit check or transcript verification to come to the table of God. That is not how God works. Instead, every part of us in invited to be in communion with God. Those parts that we only share with our closest friends. Those parts that we never share with anyone.

All the parts of us are invited. The saintly part. The sinner part. There is nothing on heaven or on earth that can separate you from that love.

So, by all means, try to impress God when you pray. Go ahead and tell the creator of the all things how great you are. And let me know how it goes. But I believe that the Gospel story today is teaching us that this kind of hubris is not desired by our God. Instead, God wants to know the real us. And, more importantly, God already KNOWS the real us. And we've been invited to feast anyway.