

I had three things happen this week that at first I didn't connect in my mind, but the more I thought about them, the more I realized their relationship. The first occurred when I was in Lafayette giving a speech and happened to be seated next to a woman who worked in Purdue's School of Agriculture. She'd been at Purdue 30 years, which is coincidentally how long ago I enrolled in college, 1984. Back in 1984, college was relatively inexpensive, you could pay for it by collecting pop bottles and turning them in for a nickel apiece. Well, maybe not that cheap, but it was pretty inexpensive. In the past 30 years, college tuition has risen roughly 1,200%. In that same time period, the cost of food has risen 200%, and though we complain about rising medical costs, they've only risen 600%, or half the rate of college costs.

This has really annoyed me, because it's meant that fewer young people can afford college, and those that go are graduating with record amounts of debt. The average student now graduates \$36,000 in debt, and it isn't inexpensive debt. You can get a mortgage rate for 3.5% interest, but if you borrow money for college, you'll pay twice as much, over 7% interest on a Direct Plus loan from the government. Our government now makes a profit loaning money to kids going to college.

This irritates me to no end, so I decided to take it out on this nice lady who worked at Purdue and I asked her why college costs were so expensive compared to when I went, and what was she doing about it. She said, “You remember about 30 years when everyone was screaming about taxes, so they started cutting them?”

“Yes, I remember that.”

“Well, the government had to cut funding somewhere, so one of the first things cut was funding for education. We get fewer tax dollars than ever before, our expenses haven’t declined, so families and students have to pay more. The state now provides less than 15% of our funding.”

That was the first experience I had this week.

The second event happened a few days later, when Joan and I were driving through town and a young man passed us driving a truck with two big Confederate flags flying from the bed of his truck. Without thinking, I said, “What an idiot.” Just as soon as I said it, I felt this deep shame and sadness come over me. Shame at myself for speaking so hatefully about another person, and sadness for the young man because I realized how few his opportunities will be compared to the opportunities I’ve had. He likely can’t afford college and the high school technical programs that could have prepared him for a job have been slashed due to cuts in education. So we now educate toward college, whether a young person is able to go or not.

The third event happened at a restaurant in Paoli when I heard a guy about my age complain about his taxes, how he didn't want to pay taxes, and didn't think he should have to. He was looking at me when he said all this, so I thought as long as we were having this conversation, I'd throw in my two cents. I said to him, "Our parents and grandparents paid taxes so we could have opportunities. Now it's our turn, and if we don't do it, our children and grandchildren won't have the opportunities we had." Then I shut up, because he was bigger than me and seemed upset and people were starting to stare.

Well, what in the world does this have to do with church? Just this. We have forgotten our blessings. We have forgotten our advantages. We have forgotten how much we benefited from the generosity and sacrifice of those who went before us. And now it is our turn to be generous, we who have been blessed, now it is our turn to return the favor, but we don't want to. So for the first time in American history, children will be worse off than their parents. Their education will be more meager, their prospects for employment will be more uncertain, their chance to own a home will be more unlikely, the possibility of one day retiring from their jobs to enjoy the fruits of their labor will be compromised. Which means they will be just like the young man I saw, with his flags flying, idealizing an event from 150 years ago, instead of happily and confidently anticipating their future. It will be as the prophet Jeremiah said so long ago, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Jeremiah 31:29)

All because we have forgotten, in this Christian nation of ours, we have forgotten a basic truth of Jesus, “To whom much is given, of him shall much be required.” (Luke 12:48) I was talking about this not long ago with someone and they said, “Oh, that’s getting into politics. A pastor shouldn’t do that.” Nonsense! Long before caring for the next generation was a political matter, it was a spiritual matter. God judged nations and cities by their care for the least of these. I heard a preacher the other day say God destroyed Sodom because of homosexuality. If that was the reason, it slipped by the prophet Ezekiel, who said, “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.” That isn’t about two men having sex. That is about being overfed, and letting the next generation starve.

Don’t let anyone tell you this is a political issue and is therefore off limits to the church. That’s the first thing people say when they don’t want you to engage a subject—*That’s political*. It might well have become politicized, but long before that, it was, and remains, a human issue, a spiritual issue. It is about paying back the blessings we’ve been given, for to whom much is given, of him much shall be required. So the next time someone comes along peddling their selfish wares, eating their sour grapes, telling you to forget your blessings and asking you to ignore your obligation to bless, you tell them you are a friend of Jesus and that you don’t live that way.