

“The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss: The Sneetches”

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Galatians 3:26-28

... for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

James 2:1-4

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ² For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

“Now, the Star-Belly Sneetches had bellies with stars.
The Plain-Belly Sneetches had non upon thars.
Those stars weren’t so big. They were really so small
You might think such a thing wouldn’t matter at all.”

Today’s Dr. Seuss story is not as popular as last week’s, *Green Eggs and Ham*. You may not be familiar with *The Sneetches*.

The Sneetches are a divided society. The Sneetches with stars on their bellies thought that they were better than the Plain-Belly Sneetches. This was bad enough but even worse was that the Plain-Belly Sneetches believed it as well. Rather than realizing that this discrimination as undeserved, they too believed they were inferior.

Their solution – when the opportunity presents itself – is to become like their oppressors. Sylvester McMonkey McBean has invented a machine that, for a few dollars, will put stars on their tummies. Yay! Now the once Plain-Belly Sneetches have smiles on their faces and everyone is the same.

For a time. You see, the Star-Belly Sneetches are used to feeling superior. They like being special. Luckily for them, McBean has a solution in his *Star-Off Machine* and soon their stars are gone.

This leads to a cycle of adding and removing stars – until McBean has all the cash and no one knows who was who.

Rather than concentrating on one theme today, I’m going to suggest three ideas for you to consider.

First, let’s acknowledge some history we have regarding stars. Those who have lost a family member in military conflict are named Gold Star Families. It’s an honor, but one that no family would choose. In elementary school, children will rack up collections of gold or colored stars for

their excellence or persistence in doing some task. You may have fond memories if you received lots of stars. But if you found it hard to earn them, your memories may be less positive.

Another set of stars were those worn by European Jews eighty years ago when those in power chose to make one group the object of their scorn and hatred.

This brings me to our first, most obvious point. Even in schools, these stars can be symbols of what divides us. Those star charts tell a story of the Successful, the Almost, and the It'll-Never-Happen.

In so many ways, our world is ordered by people's differences. We're encouraged not to remember that we are more alike than anything that divides us. Rather than practicing unity, we practice isolation and discrimination.

People succumb to the mistaken belief that we can build ourselves up by tearing someone else down. We act as if someone is inferior based on their skin tone, where they were born, who they love, or left- or right-handedness. Of course, that's just silly. Or sinful.

Even the word *race* is a misnomer. Scientists confirm that all people are so overwhelmingly similar at a genetic level that there are no races. Humanity is all one race! Food for thought as we prepare for next year's census.

Christ's Church is called to model unity for the world. This is what Paul was meant when he said there's no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. Neither geography nor culture, gender identity nor status matter. We are expected to be beyond these things.

I like baseball. I grew up listening to, and sometimes watching, baseball with my dad. When I was in college, the Pittsburgh Pirates won the World Series. Their theme song received a lot of notice that fall, "We Are Family, I got all my sisters with me."

One page that really caught my attention as I was reading *The Sneetches* is a double-page spread. Are you familiar with the symbol for infinity? A sideways 8? Would you take your bulletin and, on back, draw an infinity symbol? Keep tracing it.

I don't know if Ted Geisel (Dr. Seuss) intended us to see this double loop of Sneetches filing into the star-adding and star-removing machines as infinite. But our desire to fit in can be endless. This is the second point. We can commit all our energy and resources into trying to remake ourselves so that we feel accepted.

Think of all the hair coloring and cosmetics – even surgery. The advertising industry would cease to exist if we bought our clothes, food, homes and vehicles only to suit ourselves and our needs.

If there is a should – and I generally don't use the word – but if there is one, it's that we *should* feel great discomfort at the injustices we find around us, and great sadness for those who believe they deserve it.

Like some of you, I've struggled with self-image and with my perception of not fitting in. Feeling like you're an outsider or like you're inferior can eat at a person. Hate crimes and

violence to one's self happen, in part, because of the pain and anger people feel. We must, as people of faith, help each person to believe that they are valued.

Having said that though – here's our third point – expecting others to validate your worth or to fulfill you is unhealthy. It doesn't matter if it's friends, parents, spouse, children or even your job; it's dangerous. Because the day will come when they're not available or when you're on the outside again.

You've heard it said before: You need to find your value in and through God. God fills us each with many good things so that we can lead full lives. God equips us to be complete and whole. And God continues to provide support so that we can grow more fully into our best selves, whatever our circumstances.

As followers of Christ, we're called to look to God – not simply in some nebulous heaven beyond ourselves but within. We find God as Spirit within us, leading and guiding, shaping and equipping.

It's fine to value the difference we make, the good we do, the relationships we cultivate, but it's by looking within ourselves that we will find lasting worth. This is God's hope for each of us.

In the end of the Sneetches' story, everyone is happy. That day on the beach, the Sneetches gained new understanding about what is important and what is not.

As for McBean, we don't know much about him. He seems to exploit the sadness, fear and anger of the Sneetches. Oh, and he ends up with all the money. But stepping beyond the seeming simplicity of a children's tale, we don't know much.

Maybe he had hungry McMonkey McBeans at home waiting for him. Maybe he's feeling the financial pinch of overextending himself in buying a boat or a cabin. (Maybe he ought to sign up for Financial Peace University this fall.)

Maybe McBean is secretly helping the Sneetches to get past a hurdle that has kept them from developing further culture. Maybe now that they see each other as equals they will develop a thriving art and music community. Maybe they're create a great new type of mead. We don't need to judge him or them. Or even ourselves.

God as Spirit guides everybody who is willing to be led. Who do you need to treat more fairly? In what situations have you let yourself believe that you're inferior? Where in your life are you not in unity with others and what will you do about it?

You don't need to write the answers on your bulletin but you might think about them as Rob plays. Or this afternoon.

“... the Sneetches got really quite smart on that day,
The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches
And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.
That day, all the Sneetches forgot about stars
And whether they had one, or not, upon thars.”