

The Art of Appreciation

This is Day 29 of the civil disobedience movement that has seen thousands of protesters blocking roads in different parts of the city. There is little sign of this movement coming to any satisfactory conclusion. Instead chaos and violence continue to reign. The movement has already caused much damage to the fabric of the Hong Kong society, driving a wedge within families and among friends. After nearly a month of turmoil, the city remains as divided and polarised in its politics. I see hatred, confrontation and hostility shown right in my face on the TV screen every day. It is a Hong Kong that has grown more and more foreign to me.

No doubt the short term issue is the call for a more democratic Hong Kong. Yet underneath it is the whole culture / mind-set of being critical to others which is rather unsettling to me.

We hear criticisms all the time. Students criticise the government for their inaction and people criticise students for causing an inconvenience. Students criticise the police for the use of tear gas and people criticise university professors for siding with the students. People criticise the media for being biased and the media criticises the police for not keeping law and order. Basically, everyone is blamed for something or everything. It seems that fault-finding and finger-pointing have suddenly become part of the psyche of Hong Kong people.

One of Aesop's fables talks about the problem of criticising people. It tells of an old man and his son bringing a donkey to the market. While they were passing some people on the way, they heard one remark, "Look at that silly pair—walking when they could be riding comfortably."

Since the idea seemed sensible, the old man and the boy mounted the donkey and continued on their way. Soon they passed other

people. "Look at that lazy pair," said a voice, "breaking the back of that poor donkey, tiring it so that no one will buy it."

The old man slid off, but soon they heard another criticism from a passer-by: "What a terrible thing, this old man walking while the boy gets to ride."

They changed places, but soon heard people whispering, "Poor thing, the big strong man is riding and the little boy has to walk."

Finally the old man and the boy decided to continue their journey by carrying the donkey on a pole between them.

As they crossed the bridge, the donkey broke loose, fell into the river, and drowned.

The moral of the story is: You cannot please everyone. You cannot please everyone because people always criticise, no matter what you do.

We live in a society in which people are quick to judge because we compare everything and rate everything. It is easy to put people down by magnifying their shortcomings. We also live in an increasingly individualised world and we come to think that we are the ultimate standard of what is good and acceptable.

Yet, Jesus said in Matthew, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

We of course make hundreds of judgment every day. We make judgments in interviews and in marking assignments. We pass judgment on people's behaviour, speech and attitude in order to determine whether to trust the person. What, then, did Jesus mean when he said, "Judge not"? The word "judge" means to condemn. It means to come to a negative conclusion about another person

27.10.2014

and then to condemn them. The Bible tells us that we are not God and we can never condemn people.

In the book of John we read about an incident in which Jesus was challenged to execute a woman who was caught red handed in adultery. Jesus asked anyone who had not sinned to step forward to cast the first stone. This is a stark reminder that we should avoid condemning others because there are faults in our own life that we have to deal with.

Do not always focus on the negative. Instead, learn to appreciate the positive aspects that you can find in people. If we are more appreciative of one another, then the road to reconciliation for Hong Kong people is not far. We will live in a far better world in which people are more understanding and more tolerant of differences.

Thank you.

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27.10.2014