

## Session 2

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

### The Dignity Gap

2. The ancient, hierarchical way of establishing human dignity and worth was based on proximity to the gods-kings were thought to be divine or semi-divine and everyone else was created by a series of progressively lesser gods, ending with peasants and slaves at the bottom of the ladder.

What hierarchies of human dignity and worth would you say are at work in our times and culture? What "proximities" do we tend to use to confer greater or lesser value on people?

Consider one of your own spheres of life - for example, a group of friends, a social networking site, your workplace, school, church, or even this group. What are the subtle and not-so-subtle hierarchies of worth in this context? In other words, what makes someone a "king" or a "peasant"?

" In what ways, if any, have the hierarchies you described influenced how you view people, who you spend time with, or how you treat people?

### Bestowed Worth and Dignity

3. Briefly describe a time when you were aware of being treated with dignity. Based on that experience, how would you complete this sentence?

Treating someone with dignity means ...

4. When Jesus looked at people, he saw the image of God, and that is what caused him to treat each person with dignity.

How would you describe your own experience of being treated with dignity by Jesus?

During the course of your everyday life, in what individuals or groups do you find it relatively easy to see the image of God? In what individuals

or groups do you find it very difficult to see the image of God? Share the reasons for your response.

5. In a passage from the gospel of Luke, Jesus establishes the value of human beings using an analogy that is familiar to us now but would have been surprising in Jesus' day:

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God...Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Luke 12:6-7)

Sparrows were cheap... buy-four-get-one-free. Worth less than a cent, they were among the humblest of temple sacrifices available to the poor.

How does Jesus' use of sparrows challenge the prevailing hierarchy of human worth in the ancient world?

How does Jesus' analogy impact you personally? For example, is it shocking, deeply reassuring, somewhat comforting, or so familiar it no longer has much impact?

Would you say that your cultural context - one very different from that of Jesus' listeners-magnifies or diminishes the potential impact the analogy has on you? Why?

### **Dignity for the Least of These**

6. In his teaching, Jesus often challenged the way people thought about the greatest and the least with statements like this:

Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me also welcomes my Father who sent me. Whoever is the least among you is the greatest. (Luke 9:48 NLT)

The Greek word translated as "welcomes" is dechomai (dekh'-om-ah-ee). It can also be translated as "receive" or "accept" and is concerned primarily with hospitality-a very high value in Jesus' time and culture. Once when he was a dinner guest of a Pharisee, Jesus acknowledged three common acts of hospitality-washing feet, greeting

with a kiss, pouring oil on the head by pointing out how his host had failed at all three (Luke 7:44-46). The Pharisee may have invited Jesus to dinner, but he did not welcome Jesus.

Have you ever experienced something like this -knowing you were included but somehow still not welcomed? How did it impact you?

Among those considered the least of these in Jesus' day were children, women, prisoners, foreigners (non-Jews) and those who were sick or in need (Matthew 25:35-40). In the routines of your own life, with whom do you have contact who might be characterized as one of the "least of these" today?

Jesus' revolutionary teaching was that the "least of these" were to be welcomed-received and accepted as persons of great worth and treated with dignity. How does this understanding of what it means to be welcoming challenge or encourage you in connection with the "least of these" in your own life?