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The Itch

What is so striking in today's gospel is the wonderful gentleness of Jesus. He is under the microscope of the religious mucky mucks. "They were", we are told, "watching him closely."

While he was under the microscope, he took a look around. We don't know if folks were elbowing for a seat, or just moving kind of slyly to the best places. We don't know who the guests were, if Jesus knew them, or if they were complete strangers.

And at first, what Jesus had to say seemed like just good, sound, everyday advice. "If you walk with your nose in the air, you're likely to fall on your face." The kind of advice we might get from Miss Manners or from mom and dad. But Jesus, in all his gentleness, had something else in mind.

People then, people now, seem to feel an itch that can't be scratched when it comes to moving up in the world: whether that world is a small family in a condo or the world of a multi-national corporation or the world of a dinner party thrown for family and friends.

That itch to stand out, to stand over, to stand above, a spouse, a neighbor or fellow employee, is an itch that has itched humanity for a very long time. And oh the price so many will pay as they try to scratch that itch. Betrayals, anger, humiliation, false pride, gossip....the list is an endless one.

The recent criminal trial of the former governor of Illinois is a rather stark example of the itch; but in truth, we are none of us immune to it. We each of us are infected to greater or lesser degrees.

The drive to dominate one another comes in all shapes and sizes, but its driving force is the same: a desire to be seen by others as important, necessary, and superior. It can and does become an addiction not only for individuals, but for whole nations as well. It leads to CEOs who used to make 4 times the average worker wage and who now make 400 times as much. It leads to a gross imbalance between the few at the top who have more than they will ever need and the many whose needs are not met at all.

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