

**“I’m Cool”**  
**July 31, 2011**  
**Grove Presbyterian Church**

**Old Testament Lesson**

**Genesis 37: 1-4**

**Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.**

Joseph: if you met him you too might want to bop him on the nose because he’s so obnoxious. Well, his brothers do one better. They toy with the idea about killing him but are persuaded to simply sell him into slavery.

You may have noticed there is no mention in this translation of a coat of many colors. No amazing technocolor dreamcoat. That’s because the coat awarded Joseph by Dad really was a coat with long sleeves. Long sleeves. When you wear long sleeves, you don’t have to do the dirty work in the fields. You’re wearing the suit and tie. His brothers wear coveralls. Worse: he’s almost the baby of the family. Second to last born (*1-Reuben, 2-Simeon, 3-Levi, 4-Judah, 5-Dan, 6-Naphtali, 7-Gad, 8-Asher, 9-Issachar, 10-Zebulon, 11-Joseph, 12-Benjamin*). There’s no way he should be bossing around his older, middle-aged brothers. But Joseph, all 17 years of him (and at 17, he knows it all), likes being boss. The Alpha. He’s the coolest. Joseph wearing his Foster Grants.

Jesus, you might wish to notice, has a very different understand of who is very cool, who’s important.

**New Testament Lesson**

**Mark 12: 38-44**

**As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”**

**He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.**

**Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have**

**contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”**

One of those favorite Gospel scenes. The scene? Donations to the poor box. The rich make a grand show of it complete with trumpet fanfares, servants pushing through the temple crowd announcing that so-and-so is about to make a contribution.

Why is it that some people act as if there is some schlep following them around, holding up signs giving instructions to the audience? Applaud now, laugh now. Posers. Only thing missing were the paparazi – shame they didn’t have cameras back in Jesus’ day.

All the public agog and wowed. Sure, this was 2,000 years ago but have we changed an inch? We love our celebrities. The ‘in’ crowd. Which shouldn’t be surprising given the popularity of such shows as Entertainment Tonight, or the fact that, in the US, People Magazine has a circulation (3,600,000) surpassing Newsweek by 2 million.

In contrast: an insignificant widow, who gets no publicity, is overshadowed by the glamour of the big boys. By the way, how did Jesus know how much she gave? Simple: priests were stationed at the collection sites and announced the amount everyone gave. That would be like me collecting the offering plates and then opening each envelope and announcing what each one of you have given. How awkward. The guys who give big, of course, puff up like peacocks. They announce her paltry gift and you can imagine the crowd snickering. She’s not only anonymous but humiliated. But Jesus sees she’s giving because it’s right to give, even if it might have felt really embarrassing donating so little in contrast to the important rich man.

She, forever nameless, remains unnoticed, except by one. And that one makes all difference.

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In this scene, Jesus reminds us how Christianity is a counter-cultural religion. Especially considering:

Five year old girls with make-up on  
Must buy the right kind of shoes  
Or Louis Vuitton  
Sex and City rules  
It really is all about me  
Adore me because inside I am so desperately  
Hoping to be invited to the cool table at school  
The red carpet look at me commodity  
So others can profit off those who need to be

We hope we are counter-cultural considering what culture worships today. All the more reason for Jesus to help us redefine cool.

Originally, cool was slang for moderate and temperate. It was slang for a behavior: cool man, cool, jazz cool, black cool, don't lose you cool, chill out, don't let them make you sweat or lose your cool. We sing from "West Side Story:"

*Boy, boy, crazy boy!  
Stay loose, boy!  
Breeze it, buzz it, easy does it.  
Turn off the juice, boy!  
Go man, go,  
But not like a yo-yo schoolboy.  
Just play it cool, boy,  
Real cool!*

Nowadays the word has morphed into a definition for a caste, for the aristocrats among us whom we are urged to venerate and idolize: the popular, the envied, those who get admitted to the club, those invited to the front of the line. Who's in, who's out? Those who stroll the red carpet while the rest of us are invited to watch green with envy. Yet these too are children of God, themselves sadly the first victims of this idolatry. So we pray for them. Many are so lost.

*How does it feel to be; One of the beautiful people?*

Or as Homer Simpson teaches: maybe the coolest are those who don't need to be told they're cool.

Who really are the beautiful people? Getting dirty for Jesus is very cool.

**[Invite forward Andrew Helfer, Jillian Kinsey, Brett Taylor to talk about mission trip to Trenton New Jersey]**

Who really are the beautiful people? The coolest? Jesus might suggest the beautiful people are those who do beautiful things.