

A Word about Cole Ellenbogen

Cole Ellenbogen is a founding member of Troop 877 and was just elected to be the Troop's Senior Patrol Leader. Cole has earned the rank of Eagle Scout and constructed the cross and prayer area at this church as his Eagle Project. He has also earned the following religious awards for his faith as an Episcopalian: God and Family, God and Church, God and Life.

Within his own church, St. John's Episcopal Church in Huntington, Cole serves as a Eucharistic Minister, an Acolyte, and a Lector. He is an active member in the church Youth Group and will be joining the Youth Group on a missionary trip to Costa Rica next week. On a diocesan level, Cole served as the youth delegate for his church to the Diocesan Convention. While at the convention, he co-founded The Diocese of Long Island Youth Council—an organization dedicated to increasing youth voice and involvement within the church, as well as uniting youth from across the Island in the name of faith— and is currently serving as one of the organization's two executives. Cole is a junior at Harborfields High School.

Between You and God

by Eagle Scout Cole Ellenbogen

As we pass through life, we are all tested, and sometimes we don't even know that it's going on. In fact, the biggest test of our faith does not come from any kind of unusual happening or extraordinary circumstances, no: we actually administer our biggest test of faith to each other. Kindness, ethics, and above all commitment to God are traits that we all possess, however when confronted with the opinions of other individuals or groups, staying true to your beliefs can become difficult. This is why peer pressure and the popular opinion are the two greatest tests of spiritual strength.

Retaining your morals and beliefs when confronted by a crowd is difficult, and may make you feel alone. But when presented with such a challenge, try to think of this quote by Mother Teresa;

*“People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.
If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.
If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.
The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway...”*

The point is that the crowd and the popular opinion don't really matter in the end; you shouldn't be living your life to please them anyway. What does matter is your relationship with God because it is God that you should be trying to please. The Scout Oath, the Scout Law, and the Judeo-Christian principles hold duty to God above all else. In the Gospel according to Mathew (6:24) it is said that:

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

While this excerpt is referring to money, the concept of serving two masters applies here too; one master is the opinions of others, and the other master is of course God. Just like one cannot serve both God and money, one cannot serve both God and the popular opinion. There is a great deal of temptation attached to the general consensus of a group. I've been there, I know what it's like and I'm willing to bet that most of you do too; the suggested course of action may be easier, or seem more fun. Plus, compliance comes with the approval of a large group of people, which may appear uplifting. But just because something is easier does not make it morally right. And something that may seem fun may actually be sinful. And God only knows how far people will go for popularity and the approval of others.

I know where the road of service to the popular opinion goes, and it's not somewhere that you will want to be in the end. It isn't worth worrying about what others think about you, and, because you really have to choose between service to the crowd and service to God, it certainly isn't worth giving up eternal life. The popular opinion may seem powerful and influential now, but it, like all worldly things, is only temporary.

The love of God is eternal, and more powerful than the influence of any crowd. The love of God can mend the deepest cracks and wounds. The love of God can bridge the widest rivers and gorges. The love of God can surmount the tallest peaks and towers. The love of God is infinite and all encompassing, and to serve another master, the master of the crowd, would be to turn your back on pure powerful beauty and completeness.

As people who follow the word of God, we must make the choice to choose God as our master, because no matter what the influence of the crowd may be, everything in life is truly between us and God. Not the crowd. Not the other people.

But it is understandable that you may still be apprehensive about going against the grain; being a God pleaser rather than a crowd pleaser may seem like a lonely place. I know, and I understand. But, to quote the bible once again:

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”
-Deuteronomy 31:6

God protects and safeguards those who put their faith in him, and that is why keeping true to your ethics, beliefs, and faith is so important; in doing so, you will have God by your side, and that makes a world of difference. While it is easy to be angry, frustrated, or upset by the opinions of others, remember that it is not for us to judge them. Whether they have chosen to serve God, or serve the crowds, they too must still answer to God because God is everyone's master.

Besides the company of God, should you choose to serve him, you won't be alone in standing up for what you believe in. There have been times when standing up for what I believe in has left me feeling alone. As some of you have heard, Troop 877 was recently put through one such trial where the boys were left to choose between serving the crowd and serving God. And I am happy to say that I do not feel alone anymore, because the result was that these boys that sit before you

this morning have all chosen to stand up to the will of the crowd and that is absolutely commendable. While you may look upon Troop 877 now and see a decrease in numbers, there is no decrease in our commitment to each other, to the sacred principles of the Scout Oath and Law, and above all to God.

I would like to end where I began, and finish by reading mother Teresa's quote, with the last line:

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If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.
The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do well anyway.
Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway. For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.”*