

Ordinary 25A, 2023

Embrace the Sense of Community

There's a play by Timothy Thompson based on this parable in which he depicts two brothers vying for work. John is strong and capable; Philip is just as willing but has lost a hand in an accident. When the landowner comes, John is taken in the first wave of workers, and as he labors in the field he looks up the lane for some sign of Philip. Other workers are brought to the field, but Philip is not among them. John is grateful to have the work, but feels empty knowing that Philip is just as needful as he. Finally, the last group of workers arrive, and Philip is among them. John is relieved to know that Philip will get to work at least one hour. But, as the drama unfolds, and those who came last get paid a full day's wages, John rejoices, knowing that Philip - his brother - will have the money necessary to feed his family. When it comes his turn to stand before the landowner and receive his pay, instead of complaining as the others, John throws out his hand and says with tears in his eyes, "Thank you, my lord, for what you've done for us today!"

You loved all of your children equally

God's justice arises out of a sense of community in which we see the "eleventh hour" workers as our brothers and sisters whose needs are every bit as important as our own. (by Philip W. McLarty from *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard*)

A preacher told of a conversation with a mother who understood some of the graciousness that is exemplified in today's parable. She had raised a large number of children on her own. How did she do it? What guidelines could she offer to others in similar circumstances?

She was asked, "I suppose you loved all of your children equally, making sure that you gave all of them exactly the same treatment?"

The wise mother replied: "I loved all of them, loved them greatly, but I never wanted to love them equally. I loved the one who was down until he got up. I loved the one who was weak until she was strong. I loved the one that was hurt until he was healed. I loved the one who was lost until she was found." It seems to me that grace meets each person's need; not their deserts.

Generosity Is the Secret to Our Joy

There is an old rabbinic parable about a farmer that had two sons. As soon as they were old enough to walk, he took them to the fields and he taught them everything that he knew about growing crops and raising animals. When he got too old to work,

the two boys took over the chores of the farm and when the father died, they had found their working together so meaningful that they decided to keep their partnership. So each brother contributed what he could and during every harvest season, they would divide equally what they had corporately produced. Across the years the elder brother never married, stayed an old bachelor. The younger brother did marry and had eight wonderful children. Some years later when they were having a wonderful harvest, the old bachelor brother thought to himself one night, "My brother has ten mouths to feed. I only have one. He really needs more of his harvest than I do, but I know he is much too fair to renegotiate. I know what I'll do. In the dead of the night when he is already asleep, I'll take some of what I have put in my barn and I'll slip it over into his barn to help him feed his children.

At the very time he was thinking down that line, the younger brother was thinking to himself, "God has given me these wonderful children. My brother hasn't been so fortunate. He really needs more of this harvest for his old age than I do, but I know him. He's much too fair. He'll never renegotiate. I know what I'll do. In the dead of the night when he's asleep, I'll take some of what I've put in my barn and slip it over into his barn." And so, one night when the moon was full, as you may have already anticipated, those two brothers came face to face, each on a mission of generosity. The old rabbi said that there wasn't a cloud in the sky, a gentle rain began to fall.

You know what it was? God weeping for joy because two of his children had gotten the point. Two of his children had come to realize that generosity is the deepest characteristic of the holy and because we are made in God's image, our being generous is the secret to our joy as well. **Life is not fair, thank God! It's not fair because it's rooted in grace.** (by John Claypool from *Life Isn't Fair, Thank God!*)

Grace and Generosity

Dr. William Power, a professor at Southern Methodist University, describes an experience he had in Sunday school when he was a boy. His teacher was trying to explain to him and his rowdy friends the meaning of grace, but wasn't getting very far. She tried definitions and abstractions, to no avail. Finally, she realized something the boys had known from the start. She was not connecting. She was not getting through to them. They didn't have the foggiest notion what she was talking about.

So she took a deep breath and tried again: "Look boys, grace is the break you get when you don't deserve it. That's the simple explanation. But you won't really understand it till you experience it." (by James W. Moore from *Some Things Are Too Good Not to Be True*, Dimensions, 1994, p. 95.)