

Lent 4C – 2022

In one of the *Peanuts* cartoons, Charlie Brown sees Sally beginning to write a letter. She has written "Deer" (D-E-E-R). Charlie says, "That should be "Dear" (D-E-A-R). And then he says, "In the salutation of a letter, the proper word, and the spelling of that word is 'Dear'" (D-E-A-R). But Sally seems not to hear him. She continues to write. Her first sentence is: "Deer (D-E-E-R) are beautiful animals found in most parts of the world." When he sees her sentence, Charlie apologizes. "I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were writing about deer. I apologize." Sally responds, "Well, I should hope so! It seems to me that a lot of the problems in this world are caused by people who criticize other people before they know what they're talking about!" So Charlie, embarrassed, leaves. When he is gone, Sally crumples the paper and takes out a fresh sheet. Then she writes, "Dear Grandma."

We Prefer Justice to Mercy

Perhaps you remember the cartoon strip, Calvin and Hobbes. Calvin is a little boy with an overactive imagination and a stuffed tiger, Hobbes, who comes to life as his imaginary friend. In one cartoon strip, Calvin turns to his friend Hobbes and says, "I feel bad I called Susie names and hurt her feelings. I'm sorry I did that." Hobbes replies, "Maybe you should apologize to her." Calvin thinks about it for a moment and then responds, **"I keep hoping there's a less obvious solution."**

We have trouble accepting those whom God accepts because we take God's acceptance for granted and God's forgiveness as our right. We are much like the elder brother who preferred justice to mercy. We have worked for what we have (or so we think), and it's unfair that everyone else should not have to do the same. We have earned God's favor (or so we think) by "staying at home." We have merited his acceptance by the good life that we live. So how dare God receive and accept our sinful brother who has returned home saying he's sorry. (by Lee Griess from *Taking The Risk Out Of Dying*, CSS Publishing Company)

"Momma, I'm sorry I was so naughty":

Roy Angell once told a beautiful story about a widow during the First World War who lost her only son and her husband. She was especially bitter because her neighbor, who had five sons, lost none of them. One night while

this woman's grief was so terribly severe, she had a dream. An angel stood before her and said, "You might have your son back again for ten minutes. What ten minutes would you choose?"

Would you have him back as a little baby,
a dirty-faced little boy,
a schoolboy just starting to school,
a student just completing high school, or
as the young soldier who marched off so bravely to war?"

The mother thought a few minutes and then, in her dream, told the angel she would choose none of those times. "Let me have him back," she said, "when as a little boy, in a moment of anger, he doubled up his fists and shook them at me and said, 'I hate you! I hate you!'" Continuing to address the angel, she said: "In a little while his anger subsided and he came back to me, his dirty little face stained with tears, and put his arms around me. He said, 'Momma, I'm sorry I was so naughty. I promise never to be bad again and I love you with all my heart.' Let me have him back then," the mother sobbed. "I never loved him more than at that moment when he changed his attitude and came back to me." [Roy Angell, *Shields of Brass*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1965), pp. 70]. — Jesus said that this is how God feels about each of us. (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>)

God Said...

Is there a better picture of forgiveness in the whole Bible? It reminds me of a story about a woman who had upset her pastor because she claimed that she had conversations with God. She had attracted quite a following in the church and every day people gathered at her house, got on their knees, prayed, sang hymns and listened to her describe what God was saying to her. The pastor thought all this was getting out of hand, so he went to visit her. "I know you say you are talking with God," he said, "but what you hear talking back at you is just your imagination. Just to prove it, I want you to ask God to name three of the sins that I confessed this morning. Then tell me what God said. If you can name those sins, I'll believe that you really are talking with God." The woman sat there for a long while, praying. Then she looked up and said, "I asked God to name your three sins, **but God said, 'I forgot.'**" (by Norm Linville from *The Prodigal Father*)