

September 20, 2020

So, the last will be first and the first will be last. Sounds like good news for us Timberwolves fans!

Our reading from Jonah and our Gospel parable both speak to undeserved forgiveness and undeserved blessing. The key word is undeserved. And in our confession and forgiveness this month, we have the phrase: “We hear your word of love freely given to us, yet we expect others to earn it.”

Today I’d like to do some reflecting with this whole idea of “undeserved.” In the theological world, it is part and parcel to what God does for us in forgiveness. And it is so difficult for us grasp, because at its core it’s unfair. And that’s one of our deeply held values... We like things to be fair...

Quick story... When I was in High School, I was very serious about playing guitar. I played electric guitar in little rock and roll bands, but I was also serious about playing classical guitar.

When I a senior in High School I traveled to Chicago to visit my brother in College. The classical guitar instructor at the school happened to be giving a recital and I went. And I was mesmerized! I thought, boy that’s what I want to do.

I got all the information about the classical guitar program at the college. They had suggested pieces and scales I should be familiar with before I got there. And I started practicing like crazy! I just wanted to get into the program!

Well, the day came when I met with the admissions jury at the college. I was nervous, they named certain scales, and I whipped them off. Then I was to play a prepared piece, and I

played the prelude to Bach's first cello suite. It was difficult, but I was ready and I did a good job. Can't do it anymore, but I could then!

The jury was pleased and asked if I would like to sit in on the rest of the students. And I was very happy to do so! The next gal came in at her appointed time... She took her guitar out, and launched right into John Denver's "Sunshine on My Shoulder" – makes me happy!

She was then approved and invited to sit with me and listen to the other applicants... I thought to myself, what happened? Sunshine on my shoulder doesn't make me happy! What happened to our high standards? What happened to all the scales? I practiced for hours and hours, for years and years to get ready, and she just waltzes in with John Denver? Really? We were somehow "equals"? How dare they compare her to me, it isn't fair!

Perhaps you know what that feels like. Perhaps you've been a hard and loyal employee for a company, only to be passed over for a promotion.

Perhaps you know a child who has cancer... Perhaps you know someone who has died in an accident... Life isn't fair... We live in a context of sin and death... Sometimes you can be the hardest working person on earth, and experience a disability. And conversely, maybe you are the laziest person on earth and win the lottery.

This is real stuff; things that are undeserved happen in our everyday world all the time.

We're covetous creatures, we covet success and reward and status. We're jealous of others who have it... We live in this world of sin and death.

None of us are any more righteous than another. We are all in need of grace and forgiveness. We are the laborer who worked all day, and we are also the laborer who just showed up. We are both of those laborers and at the same time. We receive blessings, from a God who's notoriously generous and lavish. This grace is for you and for me... It connects us and levels

the field...

And life is also about participation. In fact, in our parable, the landowner seems more concerned about not participating than anything else. He goes to the market place on five different occasions, and on one occasion he even asks, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" The landowner just doesn't seem to want people to be idle. He wants them to participate! And they all receive an equal reward...

One way that I would like the story to end, is if the people who worked all day were happy for the people who received the same pay and worked a short time. Instead of being hardhearted, would it be great if they were generous like the landowner and wished the people well?

Wouldn't that be transformative? Instead of being jealous, they would be grateful?

As I've grown older, and I think aging does this to us, instead of being jealous of others, life seems more about belonging, participating and compassion. God keeps working with us. Instead of emphasizing what separates us, God is continually finding ways to connect us, one to another.

And after all, we are all in the Body of Christ. We are all very different, we are all very much one, and we celebrate our differences, and we rejoice in our wholeness. And in the kingdom of God, one day, we will all look each other in the eye, and we will see what God see's in each and every one of us. It will be healing for everyone, and we will celebrate...

Amen...