

September 24, 2023

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost / Proper 20 / Creation 3

Meditation: "That's not fair!"

Mom! That's not fair! Her piece of cake is bigger than mine!

Dad! That's not fair! How come I had to wait until I was six to learn to ride a bike and my brother gets a bike when he's only five?

Mom! That's not fair! How come I had to wait until I was eighteen to have my ears pierced, but she gets hers done when she's fifteen?

Does any of this sound familiar to those of you who grew up with siblings? We complain about perceived injustices and inequalities all the time. It doesn't stop when we reach adulthood. The issues change, but the complaints continue. It isn't fair that those people have dental plans and we have to pay out of our own pockets. The government needs to pay for our dental care.

This week I talked with a man about his life. When he was a child, he disliked his parents. They were very strict with him and his four siblings. And then something happened. Something terrible. Three of his siblings died. His parents were devastated. And they had four more children. The four youngest knew love and affection from their parents, his parents. Love and affection that the first five never knew. The four youngest received emotional support from their parents, support the older five did not receive. It wasn't fair. The two surviving older children grew to resent their four younger siblings because they were treated so much better than they had been. It caused his dislike of his parents to turn into bitterness and hatred.

They were in the market square before sunup, and they had been lucky. When the sun rose over the horizon they had been hired for the day. Their families would eat that night. A denarius was the cost of a day's food for a small family, and a denarius is what they were promised for a day's labour. And then something happened. Throughout the day more and more labourers joined them in the field, up until an hour before sunset. As they lined up for their wages, the ones hired last were paid first. They received a denarius. A full day's wages for only an hour worth of work! This continued with those hired mid-afternoon, at midday, and at mid-morning. All received a denarius for less than a day's labour.

Surely they, who had worked from sunup and borne the heat of the day would be paid a bonus. But no, they too received a denarius. It wasn't fair!

The landowner was neither miserly nor stupid. He knew that those he hired throughout the day also had families who needed to eat. He knew that nothing less than a denarius would feed those families. Yes, they were treated differently, but everyone went home with what was needed for their family to eat that night.

The workers he hired first were upset because they compared what they were paid with what those hired last were paid. Had they looked at their own pay, they would have realized that they had received what they needed, nothing more, and nothing less. They should have been happy for their neighbours; that they had been paid a full day's wage too. Nobody would have to go to a neighbour begging for leftovers to help feed their families that night.

When he grew up and became a parent himself, he learned some things. The first is that every parent has their own issues, some of which may stem from their own childhood, and secondly that most parents do the best they can at the time.

His parents had been teens when they wed and started a family. They had grown up in very restrictive, even abusive families themselves and left as soon as they could. They did the best they knew how with the first five children, but when three of them died, something happened. Like the grinch in Dr. Seuss's story, their hearts grew three sizes.

When the next four children were born, they knew they needed to do better as parents. They were also better off financially than when the first children had been born, so there was more money for more opportunities for the last four. They felt terrible about how they had treated the first five, and they had done the best they knew how at the time.

Seeing his parents' regrets about their early years as parents and having had his own eyes opened as a parent himself, he gained much insight. With new insight, and compassion, he and his parents were able to forge a strong and loving

relationship later in everyone's life. What he had seen as unfairness was really nothing more than initial inexperience which was later tempered by personal growth and changing fortunes.

The parable starts out by saying that the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, is like..... What does the parable speak of? *Justice. Righteousness. Equity.* That is what the kingdom of heaven is like. It is a place of distributive justice; a place of righteousness; a place of equity, yet we only see that when we look through God's eyes and not through our eyes, which are trained to see things as the world sees things.

When you go about your lives this week, ask how God would see what transpires.