

Meditation: “Help!”

My stepfather had always been a person to help someone else in need. It didn't matter who you were or what you needed he would help in whatever way he could to the best of his ability. He thought of himself as a strong and fiercely independent person. But independence is a fallacy. None of us are truly independent. We all depend on others for many things. As he neared the end of his life, my stepfather could not do many of the things he had become accustomed to doing for himself. Minor household repairs and driving to name just a couple. At the time, I figured that the reason he was still around was that he needed to learn to graciously accept help something he was resistant to learning. More often than not when something needed doing mom had to take my stepfather out of the house so I could make the necessary repair.

When we think of ourselves as independent, I wonder if it is really pride, or even arrogance showing through. Perhaps a bit of 'I don't want to have to stoop to accepting charity' and a bit of 'nobody else can do it like me.' Or perhaps it is a control thing. Having to admit that we can't do something without help means that we are not fully in control of the situation. Whatever it is, the fact is that we all need help from others. Sometimes we need more help than at others. Some people need more help than others. But we all need help. I know if it hadn't been for someone to employ me in the summers, for the financial support of the Billies Fund that offered bursaries, for the guidance of professors and their assistants, for the support – financial and emotional – of Barbara, and many others, I would never have made it through seminary.

It appears, at least from today's gospel lesson, that even Jesus needed help. Jesus came to spread the good news of the kingdom of God; to bind up the brokenhearted, to restore sight to the blind and to cure the lame, to heal the sick, and to proclaim freedom to those held captive. That's a lot to do, and even though he is God, he was only one man. Jesus called his disciples, who until now had been following him around like a puppy follows its master, and sent them out, two by two, to do likewise. And Jesus calls us too, to do the same as the disciples of his time, to spread the good news of the kingdom of God and to help those in need. When it comes to building the kingdom of God there is a saying that 'without God we cannot, without us God will not.' I wonder, without us, perhaps God cannot either.

At this point in the sermon I was going to talk about God's call in our lives, to take up our various ministries in faithfulness, and about God's constant presence in our lives, and then the sermon prep took a sharp left turn as I read "Gratitude" by Diana Butler Bass.

As I read, the thought occurred to me, I wonder, were the disciples helping Jesus, or was Jesus helping the disciples?

First some background. "Gratitude," says Diana Butler Bass, "is not about stuff. Gratitude is the response to the surprise of our very existence."

Gratitude – noun and verb, emotional and ethical; personal and communal. At a personal level, when we are grateful, we are happier, more content, and that has a bearing on our mental and physical and spiritual health and on the length of our lives. But what about at a societal level.

We live in a time when we are not grateful as a society. We live in fear and distrust and dissatisfaction that we will never have what we want or feel we deserve. We live in a time when we think we can be independent, we can go it alone, we don't need help from anyone. And these attitudes kill gratitude. What if, as a society, we felt grateful. What would that look like? Would we, as a people, be more willing to share? Would there be more justice? Would there be more peace and less violence? I wonder.....

When the disciples ministered to others they would have been on the receiving end of the gratitude of others, even though they themselves may have felt that what they had done was insignificant. When they ministered to others they would have seen that others had problems far larger than their own. Both could have made them more aware of God's blessings in their own lives, which would serve to make them feel a sense of gratitude. And that could result in changes to behavior, like a greater willingness to be kind, patient, sharing, supportive..... And their gaining a deeper sense of gratitude in their own lives, could be spread to deepen a sense of gratitude they felt as a society, which in turn could result in.... contentedness, less violence, happiness, peace, joy.

Maybe that is what our call at this point in time needs to be about.... Instilling a sense of gratitude in our society, convincing others that instead of a scarcity of resources, we have all that we need, maybe not what we think we want or deserve, but what we need, and that there is more than enough to go around. And if we succeed, where might that lead? Contentedness, less violence, happiness, peace, joy....

I wonder.....

