

When I first began studying for this homily, my attention was immediately attracted to David Lose's introductory question. He began by asking: "Given the choice, which would you choose, love or justice?" He goes on to discuss the choices between love and justice that appear in our gospel reading. But I **first** wanted to know if this question translates to any of our other readings today? I am pretty sure that our Psalm does not entertain this idea in any way. On the other hand, I am pretty sure that our Jonah reading does address this question. Jonah is really wanting God to choose justice but in the end God chooses love, as God **always** does, you know, grace and mercy. Finally, I believe I can make a strong case that Paul's choice between living and dying is the same as a choice between love and justice. If you want, we can explore this thought later on an individual or small group basis.

I want us to look a little deeper now at our reading from Jonah. Have you ever wondered what God is up to in and with your life? Well, I think **this** is also Jonah's story in a nutshell. Jonah really did not want to proclaim death and destruction to the Ninevites because Jonah **really** knew down deep that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and yes, **also** ready to relent from punishing. In a way, Jonah is saying to God – I know what you told me to tell them but I also know what kind of God you really are, so I knew you would not do it, and consequently, **I** would just be foolish looking.

Now, think about how many different Christians today **joyfully** talk about God as a God of death and destruction, a God to be feared, like they have never, ever heard of God's steadfast love and mercy. Does this strike you as odd? Does it also reinforce to you, to us, that God's ways are not our ways? **We** cannot **assume** ever to know the heart and mind, and will of God. God has a plan and that plan is built **around** God's love and mercy. Our job is first and foremost to **believe** and **trust** in God's love and promises. And secondly, out of **gratitude** for that love and those promises we are to care for and love and serve others just as God has cared for and loved us.

Now, think about our gospel reading today. If you were one of the workers hired last, you would have gone from despair and hopelessness to ecstatic joy because you now can **really** care for your family. On the other hand, if you were one of the first workers hired, you have toiled all day knowing you **could** provide for your family. But when you heard how the later hires were treated you came to the conclusion in your **own** mind that you would receive more than the agreed amount, after all, it is only fair and just - right? And when what you thought did not materialize, you went from gratitude to resentment. Has that happened in your life? How did you react? I know **I** acted pretty poorly one time when this did happen in my life while working at the school district. And although this event happened nearly twenty years ago, I have not yet taken action to rectify it. Maybe when I return someday to Alaska.

Returning to David Lose's thoughts on our gospel reading, he suggests that this parable today is at one level all about generosity but **then** he goes onto suggest that **every** act of generosity is also and simultaneously an act of love. What do you think? Is there, in fact, a connection between generosity and love? I could diverge **right** here and begin to make this about stewardship, which is coming up soon, but I am not. I do want to continue, however, by turning some of David's statements into questions for you to ponder. Do justice and love clash necessarily and routinely? Does justice count and love loses track? Does justice calculate and love just lets go? Does justice hold all things in balance and love and generosity give everything away upsetting our carefully crafted balances? Is love the opposite of justice? David says not really. Love also does not countenance or encourage injustice. But rather, love passes beyond the realm of justice and law **into** the realm of **relationship**. Wow there once again is one of those words I use quite often.

We know that God cares about justice. The law, prophets, and Jesus' own life and ministry testify to that very fact. But in the end, justice can **only** make things **better**. It is **love** that **saves**, and so when forced to choose – between exercising God's just judgement against us or forgiving and accepting us in love – God in Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection **chose** love. Which would you choose? Which **do** you choose?

There are two parables that Jesus begins by saying the kingdom of heaven is like. One is the prodigal son and one is our parable about the landowner. The question I have for you is are these parables about the kingdom of heaven or are they about God? Many people believe that they are really about God. Can you identify common characteristics about God in these two Parables? What about unfathomable generosity and, of course, love, **vast** love?

Chad Bird said it this way: "*If the prodigal son left 3, 5, or 99 more times for that faraway country, and dragged himself home again, reeking of booze and cheap perfume and pig slop, would the Father still welcome him home with a hug and a party? - Yes, - without a moment's hesitation.*"

And Martin Luther said it this way: "*From love there proceeds a joyful, willing and free mind that serves the neighbour and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss. We do not serve others with an eye toward making them obligated to us. Nor do we distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or ingratitude. Rather, we freely and willingly spend ourselves and all that we have, whether we squander it on the ungrateful or give it to the deserving.*"

This is just as our father does, who gives all things to all people richly and freely, making 'his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.'"

Hear then the good news:

Paul talks in our Philippians reading about living our lives in a manner worthy of the cross of Christ.

There are numerous places in the Bible where unanticipated hardships, or perhaps grace towards others, become testing grounds for faith, loyalty, and thankfulness.

They also show how prone **we** are to respond ungraciously to hardships or even perceived hardships, despite **God's** generosity.

This parable is a reminder of the absolute gift of generosity that does not **demand** response.

That does **not** account for reciprocity.

That does **not** calculate metrical measures.

Because – **then** - generosity **is not** generous.

By definition generosity is not accountable, calculable, or measurable.

God **is** about unreckonable grace.

God's generosity is not only exemplified in this parable, but it also extends beyond it.

Even if fleeting, maybe if we can extend generosity, not so much for the sake of ourselves, but for the sake of others - that they may see a glimpse of God.

Grace and peace to you, my friends. Live with generosity and love.

Amen