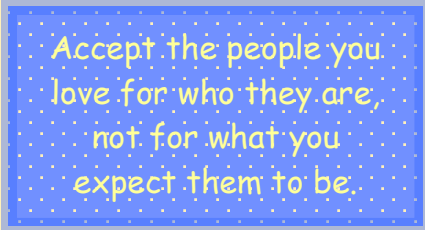


October 11, 2015

"Thank You"

Mark 10:17-31

Psalm 150



Accept the people you
love for who they are,
not for what you
expect them to be.

I did a funeral yesterday for a man who reminded me of my dad - a very, stubborn man. You see as much as I love my dad there are times that he drives me crazy. He is so stubborn. And there are times that my wife Barb in exasperation says to me "oh you're just like your dad". And I scream "nooooooooooo..."

Within families and within relationships we do recognize ourselves in each other. And in this gospel reading Mark invites us to recognize ourselves in the rich young ruler. How rich? Don't know - later it says he was very wealthy – like all of us here. Statistics show that if we have a roof over our head and if we have enough food to eat and if we have access to medical care, we are part of the richest 20 percent in the world. In other words we qualify as rich young rulers. So Mark the writer is talking to us. And Jesus is talking to us.

As rich as he was something was missing in this young man's life. And he comes to Jesus with a very honest question. "Teacher (sign of respect) what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (In this context eternal life is better translated abundant life here and now and forevermore) Another way of asking this could be, "Teacher what must I do to fill the empty hole in my life, a hole that nothing is able to fill?"

Emptiness - Loneliness - Futility - No purpose - Pointlessness -
Vacuum - Dis-satisfaction with life in general -

These are the things the young man is expressing. Do you ever feel that way? All of us do. It is part of life, part of the human experience: Some days are great, some are ordinary, some are lousy, some full of joy, some full of pain. All part of the human experience

The rich young ruler experienced all those things. Jesus had compassion for him. "You have heard what you are to do. Obey the commandments of

Moses." "I have done all those things" he said. He had done all the right things, he had done everything he was supposed to do. And yet he felt miserable. "Do you ever feel that way?" Do you see yourselves in him". Yes, I think we all do – those of us who are rich like that young man.

"So one thing is left" Jesus said, "Sell all you have and give it to the poor and come follow me". And he couldn't do it. Any more than you and I could. To give up his entire identity - his entire sense of self – his sense of security and identity – it seemed impossible. Why did Jesus ask him to do such an impossible thing?

Again the clue comes in the conversations Jesus has with his disciples later "We have given up everything to follow you" they said to him. Jesus: That is true. And those who have left their houses, their lands, their parents, or their families for My sake, and for the sake of this good news will receive all of this 100 times greater than they have in this time—houses and farms and brothers, sisters, mothers, and children, along with persecutions—and in the world to come, they will receive eternal life. But many of those who are first in this world shall be last in the world to come, and the last, first.

It still doesn't make sense yet, does it. Unless we think of the great divide between the rich and the poor. Not just monetary divide, but attitudes of rich towards the poor. I have a good friend who is very rich. He is a self made man growing up in poverty but starting his own company and becoming very successful. We were talking about this passage just after I had just preached on it many years ago. And I had suggested that maybe what Jesus was saying was to truly give away all our money.

Marty he said, "if I were to give away all my money I know that within a few years I would have it all back again. Because I know how to make money and so many people just don't" There was a certain arrogance to that but also some truth. He knows the system; knows how it works; literally knows how to make money. But at that time, both he and I were forgetting one thing.

It's not about the money per say, it's about the relationships - relationships of solidarity and connectedness one to the other. All of us identifying ourselves as part of God's family, all of us living life, being human, having

that incredible connection of being human and being God's people together.

Richard Rohr is helpful here. He is a contemporary theologian and writer. He talks about the human experience being seen in the story of Christ which he sees as an archetype for all human beings. For Christians he says, "The map of Jesus' life is the map of Everyman and Everywoman; divine conception, ordinary life, betrayal, abandonment, rejection, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. In the end it all comes full circle, and we return where we started, but now transformed."

When we go it alone, as the rich young ruler was trying to do we feel disconnected, empty, purposeless, and futile. But when we recognize our deep connection to the other our life takes on meaning.

The rich young ruler could not let go of that which entrapped him. He could not see the freedom found in seeing poor people in equal relationship with himself in the spirit of God's presence. And he turned away from Jesus.

What are the things we hold onto that prevent us from experiencing full connection (communion) one to the other?

Maybe it's our riches as well. Maybe it's something else we are totally attached to. It may even be our relationships to our spouse or our family – putting so much pressure or expectation on them that they are supposed to be everything we need.

Jesus invites us to let go of whatever it may be – to give it away so to speak and to find meaning in our deep connections as human beings created by God. In church we celebrate those relationships, those connections. In church we see each other as brothers and sisters and these relationships are crucial to experiencing eternal life – abundant life now and forevermore.

I remember when my brother Andrew died at 34 years old. At the time it felt like there were two cancers we were fighting. The cancer within Andrew's body and the cancer of discontent, distrust and general angst

that is common among families dealing with this kind of pain. But our church family was the family that grounded us. Because we knew we were not alone!

All of us as humans experience the Christ story – divine conception, ordinary life, betrayal (like cancer), abandonment (feeling we are alone), rejection, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. In this story there is great healing.

Thanks be to God.