

“Getting What We’ve Got Coming”

Luke 17:5-10; Proper 22-C, Oct. 2, 2016

One Tuesday morning a young mother went to a church where she, her husband and their five children were all members! She went there to see the pastor because of something rather shocking that had happened to her and her husband earlier that same morning. Obviously, she had been crying! All of the normal tell-tale signs were there: Her nose was red. Her eyes were swollen and if you looked closely—you could see that her hands were shaking.

“Pastor,” she said, “you know that we have five children and we don’t make all that much money! We can’t necessarily afford to do all the things for our children that many other parents do for their children! Nevertheless we try our best to make certain that every one of our children feels greatly loved! We often do things together as a family that are inexpensive; things like going to the zoo or taking a picnic to the State Park out on the lake!

This morning, however, when we woke up my husband and I received a great shock from our second-youngest son! He had left an envelope on the kitchen counter for us containing a note in which he explained that the \$1 weekly allowance he had been receiving from us was not nearly enough! He recently discovered that his best friend was receiving a \$5 weekly allowance from his parents—and he wanted the same. He then proceeded to give us an itemized list of all the things he does around the house for which he believed he should be more handsomely paid: (1) Making my bed 7 days a week at 25 cents a day--\$1.75; (2) Doing my homework without having to be told at 20 cents a day--\$1. (3) For carrying out the garbage 4 days a week at 25 cents a day--\$1. Without my sharing everything that was on that young man’s list, you probably will figure out that the total cost came to just a little over \$5 a week.

“Pastor,” this woman said, “where did we go wrong!”

Later that day, after talking with her pastor and her husband this is what these parents decided to do. After supper they sat down to talk with their son, having come up with an itemized list of their own! (1) For buying a house and giving you a room of your own--\$10 a day; (2) For buying your book bag, notebook, school supplies, along with paying for your sporting equipment, and field trips--\$25 weekly!” (3) For washing, drying and folding your clothes, and for providing you with 3 square meals a day--\$50 weekly!

Brothers and sisters, it didn’t take this young boy very long to figure out that the benefits he was receiving on a daily basis from his parents were far greater than anything he could ever hope to pay back to them!

And isn't this the very message that Jesus was hoping to share with his disciples back then, and with his disciples like you and me present here this morning, at the tail end of our Gospel lesson today?

Let's remember that when Jesus first told this parable originally about a servant and his relationship with his master; or even more properly understood by us today perhaps—as that parable between the owner of slave and the slave himself—he was living in a much different time and culture than the one we are living in today!

So when Jesus asks his initial question to get the disciples thinking, and to get you and me thinking too, about our proper place in the kingdom of God—it's actually a very rhetorical question—meaning that the answer to the question was built into the question itself! --- *“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table?’ Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me and dress properly and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?”*

You know – while that hypothetical situation might seem somewhat feasible to us today—that a master might somehow occasionally surprise his servant in a gesture of good will and appreciation in doing something like that—this never would have happened in Jesus' day.

We believe it is always appropriate to say “Thank You!” to anyone who does even the smallest acts of kindness towards us in our day, whether we are paying them for their services rendered or not—but this is certainly not how it was in Jesus' day. Perhaps we could increase our understanding of what Jesus is saying to us here by referencing two modern day analogies!

- (1) Taxi cab driver: When you are a guest in a major city without your own car or a rental car, you probably will get from one side of the city to the other by calling a cab.

When you flag down that cab and get inside of the taxi, does the driver determine your destination, or do you determine your destination? Where you arrive at where you were hoping to do—do you pay the fare or does the taxi cab driver pay the fare? Do you thank him for actually taking you to the place you were hoping to go? You might thank him but you shouldn't be surprised that he didn't drop you off at some other unknown destination.

(2) Waitress: Or how about when you enter a restaurant to order a meal? Does the waitress serve you and your fellow guests in that restaurant or do you get up and serve her?

Does she get decide what you are going to eat, or do you decide what you are going to eat? While you might express your appreciation for her service with a 25% tip; you are not under any kind of legal requirement to be as generous as that!

There were times when Jesus' disciples wondered if the cost of their discipleship was perhaps just too great! That's how it was for that rich young ruler who came before Jesus very eagerly one day, bowing before our Lord very respectfully and address our Lord very respectfully too! He deemed the cost of discipleship to be far too great—so with his face downcast, Mark tells, he went away very sad! But this is precisely when Peter speaks up and says: *“Lord we have left everything to follow you” (Mark 10:28)!* In other words, Peter's inference was to Jesus, “Hey, Lord, what's in it for us?”

And Jesus does not seem to be bothered by Peter's question at all. Jesus does tell us that there is reward—a reward that many of us are experiencing right here at this very hour again today! *“Truly I say to you, there is NO ONE who has left house or brother or sisters, or mothers or fathers, or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:29-31)!*

There were times when Jesus' disciples felt they were entitled to some greater compensation than the one they were currently receiving. Near the end of his ministry, James and John approach Jesus about sitting, one of them at his right hand and the other of them at his left hand in the age to come! Jesus asked them, *“Are you able to drink the cup that I must drink, and be baptized with the baptism of fire that I must undergo...”*

There were times when they argued among themselves who was the greatest, all in the presence of the Holy Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, who entered our world to pay the heavy price of our sin and rebellion! I like that saying I heard some years ago: “He came to pay a debt he did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay” (2 Corinthians 5:21)!

Of course, there are times when we have a right to make certain that we are “Getting What We've God Coming” to us. And there were times when people in this nation, and people in many other parts of the world too, could come to some

type of verbal agreement—about services that would be rendered to a customer—and the proper amount of money that would be then paid to that business owner in return—and everything could be agreed upon with that which simply used to be called a “Gentleman’s Handshake.”

But times have changed! Circumstances have changed too! There was a phrase you used to hear years ago, you don’t hear so much anymore: “A man is only as good as his word! Don’t make promises you can’t keep and honor all the promises that you do make!”

Of course, among human beings, very well-intentioned at times, extenuating circumstances do alter the course of events occasionally. I talked to my twin sister on the phone Friday night, who is purchasing my father and mother’s house—the house we all grew up in. She and her husband Mark are all ready to close on that house—except for one rather big problem—Hurricane Matthew is hovering off the eastern shore of Florida—and there is no way that insurance companies are selling insurance policies to people whose properties could be totally annihilated by Matthew—until that storm is disintegrated, never to be a threat to homeowners ever again! Yes, there are times when all of us are hoping to get what we’ve got coming to us, but in terms of our place in eternity—not nearly—so much so!

Jesus wants us to understand that we really don’t want what we think we have coming to us! We think we ought to get good things from God because we see ourselves as being good persons who serve God’s smiles, his blessings, and his eternal gratitude. But actually, from God’s own perspective—that’s bunk!

Listen to what Jesus said, *“The Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom—all causes of sin—and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 13:41-42). That’s what we’ve got coming to us and we certainly don’t want that, do we?

So that our Heavenly Father did not have to give us what we’ve got coming to us, he sent his Son into the world to save us, to rescue us, to move us from the sinners we were to the saints he wants us to be. To this end, Jesus lived his entire life! So that we don’t get what we’ve got coming to us, Jesus fulfilled the commandments we have broken. He resisted every temptation that Satan threw at him and when things became intensely painful for him, Jesus didn’t complain about how HE the INNOCENT ONE was being punished for ALL OF US the GUILTY! Wonder of wonders, Jesus did his duty and performed the work which gives eternal life. Jesus got what he didn’t deserve so that we might receive what we haven’t earned!

It's amazing, but listen even though this is a little bit off-colored: If you saw a waitress spit in your food before she served it to you, what would you do? You might report her to her manager; you might call the health department. I doubt if you would ever go back into that restaurant again! In contrast to what we would do, look with me once again this morning what Jesus, our Lord and Savior, has done for all of us!

Humanity didn't spit in his food; people spit in his face. When that happened Jesus didn't complain. He didn't file a report. He didn't think it unfair when old friends tried to throw him off a cliff; or when his disciples deserted him when the authorities came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane, or when a friend betrayed him with a kiss. He didn't bail on us when false witnesses lied about him; when they beat him; when they whipped him, when they crucified him! God's Son was declared guilty so we, on Judgment Day might be found innocent. Jesus died alone so we might live for eternity in heaven.

Do you remember our opening story—the one about the boy who attempted to charge his parents for taking out the garbage and for doing his homework without having to be told?

I shared with you how the parents gave their second-youngest son an itemized bill of their own—convincing him that the benefits they provided for him far outweighed any thing he could ever do for them. After doing so, when their young son was looking very worried, that's when the boy's Dad picked up a big red magic marker and wrote across that itemized bill: "PAID IN FULL." This happened not because the son had the resources with which to pay his parents, but instead because of their undying love for their son; the kind of undying love God wants us always to share with one another! Amen