

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost Christ Church Episcopal 2023

My nephew, who recently graduated from medical school, managed to secure a scholarship to do graduate studies in England. He did all the work with minimal help from anyone, including me.

I was a little disturbed when I learned that he was doing all the research and applications for the school in secret. Even after he received admission and was awarded a scholarship, he didn't share the excitement with anyone. Not even his parents.

He had to inform me of his plans because he needed some financial assistance in the application process. But he had asked me not to tell anyone about his plans. I was not sure why he wanted to keep it a secret. I thought maybe he wanted to surprise everyone after all is done. I was waiting for him to share the good news. He didn't say anything.

Two days before departure, I nudged him to tell at least his parents. I encouraged him to send a group text to family to say goodbye. He agreed to tell his parents, and grudgingly sent a group text to say goodbye.

I later came to learn that there is a genuine belief that when someone succeeds, others including family members don't necessarily share their excitement. The belief is that many people will be envious and resentful and will do whatever they can to disrupt success. Witchcraft is the preferred method of disruption. Any sign of success is met with witchcraft.

My Nephew, although a medical doctor, believed that if anyone became aware of his plans, they would be envious and try to interfere with his dreams.

Why do we envy? Why do we resent other people's success or blessings. Why do we think we deserve more than what we have? Or perhaps why do we think that others don't deserve as much.

Envy is more common than we would like to believe. It comes in different shapes and forms. Envy has been with us since creation. From Genesis to revelation envy seems to be a recurring theme.

Adam and Eve committed the sin of envy. They wanted to have what God had. Although they were in paradise, that was not enough. They wanted more. Abel and Cain are another case of envy. Cain was envious of his brother Abel. He believed that God loved Abel more than he loved him. He ended up killing his brother.

The prodigal son and his brother are another case in point. The older brother was not happy that his young brother had returned. He was not happy that his father welcomed him with a big feast. The older brother didn't believe that his brother deserved anything.

In the lessons today, Jonas didn't believe that the people of Nineveh deserved forgiveness. He was envious and angry at God for forgiving the people. In the gospel we have another example of people feeling resentful. And I think we can sympathize with them

You can imagine working in the fields on a very hot day for 12 hours. You are joined by someone at the end of the day, and they work for one hour. You expect to be rewarded more for your hard work. Instead, you receive the same amount as the one who worked for one hour. Yes, although you receive what you were promised, humanly speaking it does not seem fair. You think and believe that you deserve more! Or perhaps, you believe that the one who came late deserves less.

As I contemplate about this gospel passage, I find myself thinking. "What is it that I deserve". Do I deserve anything? What do others deserve? How many years of life do I deserve? Do I deserve to live 30 years or 130 years. Do I deserve perfect health? Or perhaps do I deserve to suffer cancer?

I don't know your answers to these questions. These are difficult questions. They involve our perception of self-worth. They also involve what we think about others.

For me, I think that, on one hand I deserve nothing. But on the other hand, I think I deserve it all. On one hand, none of us deserve anything at all. But on the other hand, all God's children deserve it all.

I realize that indeed all is gift. All is grace. Life itself is a gift. The breath I am taking in at this moment is a free gift. All is undeserved mercy of God. God doesn't owe us anything.

On the contrary, we owe God everything: our time, our talent, our money, even our very lives. The lives we live are lives that God has given to us; the clothes on our backs, the food on our table, our health in its varying degrees, the gifts of mind and body to do the jobs we've been called to do all of that is the sheer gift of God. If everything is sheer gift from God, then nobody deserves anything.

Yet, I believe that God is so gracious, that he has abundantly blessed all of us. As John puts it, 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. Since God in his fullness has poured out his grace upon grace too all, I can say that everyone deserves all.

In the gospel and the psalm, God is described as gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness. Jonah described God as a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.

It is for this reason I am willing to proclaim that all God's children deserve God's grace upon grace. Unlike Jonah who thought that the people of Nineveh didn't deserve any forgiveness,

I believe that all God's children without exception deserve their daily bread. They deserve forgiveness. They deserve love. They deserve respect

In the kingdom of God to which we are called to belong, Justice looks different. The parable of the farm workers was addressed to the Pharisees, men who had spent their entire lives carefully attending to even the smallest details of religious life. They had spent their lifetimes doing what they thought was "right" in the eyes of God.

Because of the sacrifices they had made, they thought that they deserved to be richly rewarded. They were offended by the idea that those who had not engaged in life-long serious study of God's Word and holy law, could at a late hour walk into God's kingdom alongside those who labored for that reward all of their lives.

The point of Jesus' teaching is that it is not the industriousness of the laborer that counts. What counts is God's grace upon grace to all his children.

In Jesus Christ we find that what seems to be the unfairness of God in saving those who don't seem to deserve it, is in reality the grace of God for you and for me. So, I worry

not about those who don't seem to deserve it. I am reminded that, except for God's grace in Christ, neither do I.

In a way we're all latecomers, aren't we? And in Christ it's never too late to come home to God. In this parable, Jesus is inviting us into his kingdom. He is inviting us to join him in inviting the last ones—the sick, the poor, the latecomers, the unimportant. Instead of comparing and complaining like Jonah, Jesus wants us to be the prodigal father who welcomed his son back in the fold.

Jesus is calling each one of us, to join him in this new kingdom. A kingdom where there are no late comers. A kingdom where no one is undeserving. A kingdom where no one is judged or dehumanized. Amen