

Message: *Kin-dom Gratitude*

May God's Grace and peace be with you this day!

In Our series of Kin-dom Living, the scriptures have led us to explore different aspects of living into this call to follow Jesus as disciples. My hope is that as we focus on each facet of kin-dom living, each of us will identify (I will identify) areas for growth in discipleship. The focus of Kin-dom living for today is humility.

I learned a new joke this weekend, and I'm going to share it with you. First, I have to set the context: A friend was remarking about a recent text message she got from her husband... she had left him notes about what to do for the morning routine...about what joke to put in the kids lunch boxes (a practice she does every day...). So naturally we asked, what was the joke? For her daughter, 'why did the cheerleader cross the road?' Answer: 'To give her mother a hug'. For the son, why did the LAX player cross the road?' Answer: 'To give his mother a hug'.

In our gospel reading from Luke, it is almost as if Jesus is telling a joke... two people went up to the temple to pray. However, the funny part of the joke gets pretty serious when one character is just like the audience to whom Jesus is speaking... I imagine the group got quite quiet as Jesus went on with the parable.

What do we notice about this parable? what do we notice about the two persons?

A quick compare/contrast analysis reveals... both went to the temple to pray... thus we can surmise that both persons are devout in their faith. The similarity ends there, I think.

One of them is part of the religious establishment while the other is an outsider. We might notice that one is law-abiding while the other is not. (Remember, the Pharisee isn't boasting so much as he is simply describing accurately that he has done those things the law prescribes as proper.) Going a little deeper, we might also recognize that one prays from a sense of confidence while the other from desperation or that one seems rather smug while the other is humble.

There is one other means of distinction between the two...one is righteous and one is justified.

Let's unpack these two words in scripture... '*To be righteous, according to the biblical witness, is to conform your life to the law. It is to achieve through diligent effort a life that reflects the tenets of the Torah and in this way remain in relationship with the Holy One of Israel. To be justified, however, is to be called and considered worthy and restored to right relationship with God by God's own action rather than by our own'* (D. Lose). The basis of distinction, then, is either what I've done or what God has done. To be righteous is very hard to do... and striving for righteousness leads to feelings of unworthiness or never measuring up. A focus on being righteous also carries with it the very real temptation of judging (from our own view) others of their ability to measure up

in righteousness. IN a phrase, 'you're one of those people'... tending to place people in categories of otherness. The Pharisee in the parable has this tendency.

To be justified is entirely different. Justification, in contrast to righteousness, does not depend on our own efforts. Justification is what God does for us, each of us, in the work of Jesus on the cross. We can take neither credit nor responsibility for our standing before God. In that moment of Jesus' self-surrender we are made right with God, forgiven and freed; we are recipients of a profound gift.

To be justified is to know that there is nothing I can do... it is only God that can make things right. It is a moment of trusting in God; a moment of surrender to God's will, not my will.

Here's the hard part... Justification is not about our accomplishments... we are beloved children of God and of infinite worth to God and are free to do our best in our variety of responsibilities not in order to deserve God's love, but because we are loved... Justification is just-because love. AND, when you recognize you are justified you receive all of life back (new life) as a gift to be treasured rather than a goal to be accomplished. [You are enough...and you are loved.][I am enough/I am loved]

Imagine the difference of seeing everything around you NOT as something to be earned, achieved, or protected but rather to be received as a free gift, delighted in, and shared with joy and abandon. Self-worth, dignity, purpose, and most especially the people around you – all these are gifts God gives as our adoring parent. And the people around us are, particularly, seen as precious children of God who are also recipients of God's favor and love and deserving of our respect and care as well.

In light of God's nature to "justify the ungodly," (the apostle Paul writes) there is no "other," for we are kindred recipients of the love and grace of the eternal God.

So if I had to summarize this passage it is trust... trust in God... in God's faithfulness... in God's forgiveness... in God's love. Why? Because as Jeremiah (29:10-14) tells us... God has plans for us...plans that include us...plans for good, and not harm...so, trust in God, trust also in Jesus Christ, who asked that we be forgiven and freed, who goes before us, who readies a place for us, died and rose again so that we would have new life.

So, Why did the neighbor cross the road? Answer: to give a hug the new neighbor.

Amen.

HUMILITY: is not thinking ill of yourself but of not thinking of yourself much differently from the way you're apt to think of another. In other words, having the capacity for being no more or less pleased with yourself when you make a good play than when your opponent makes a good play.

[from *Beyond Words*, F. Buechner. P162.]