

Homily – Life Isn't Fair

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Life and death are not fair. Some live to be 101-years old and others don't. Some have great health and others seems to struggle with one health issue after another. Some people seem to have perfect children, grandchildren, jobs, marriages, homes, and wisdom. Notice that I said "seem to have" all these perfect things.

And, if you are like me, then you start to tense up inside when think about the unfair things that are happening in your own life. Life and death are not fair, and it can make us very grumpy when we start thinking about it. Most of us have been raised as children to want fairness, and when we don't get it we can be driven to anger.

See if you can related to this story.

A few years back when my daughter was fifteen-years old and my niece was eleven, my mother took them both to the Pittsburgh Zoo. While visiting the gift shop at the Zoo my mother allowed Katie and Sarah to each select a gift for themselves. Katie select a \$2 animal magnet and Sarah selected a \$20 stuffed animal. When my mother saw what they had selected, she had Katie select a second animal magnet so that she was spending \$4 on one grandchild and \$20 dollars on the other. And, Sarah, the one who had selected the \$20 stuffed animal was livid and indignant. She felt it was so unfair that Katie got two gifts and she only got one. Sarah didn't enjoy the stuffed animal because she was angry at the unfairness of it all. Fairness got in the way of joy.

What do you think? Was the fair thing to have the same number of gifts, or was fairness to have more equity in the value of the gifts?

Fairness has to do with equity and consistency. It has to do with sportsmanship and justice. It has to do with karma. For many, fairness means that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to

bad people. Fairness is the way we want the world to work. It is the way we want to be treated but, this is not the way the world works. It is also not the way that Jesus lived his life.

Today's Gospel reading that we heard read a few minutes ago, is a parable or story that Jesus tells to help us live into the kingdom of God. It is told to help us live a life of wisdom. It is a lesson in which Jesus lifts up the dishonest manager, and tells us to be like the dishonest manager. We are to be shrewd. We are to use dishonest means to make friends.

Not only does this story make my head spin, but it makes me angry, for it rubs up against my sense of justice and fairness. Jesus shouldn't be complimenting the dishonest manager. He should be condemning him.

Is Jesus being facetious?

If we heard the tone of his voice would we hear that Jesus doesn't really mean what he is saying?

Is Jesus crossing his fingers behind his back as he says these things that make no sense?

Jesus is telling us a parable that rubs us wrong. Jesus should be condemning the dishonesty and not letting go of it. The result of the deceitful activities should be punishment and justice. Jesus is supposed to tell us to avoid this type of fraudulent activity and avoid untruthful people.

Where does it end? How bad does it have to get before Jesus sticks up for the fair thing?

The Bible tells us that Jesus hung out with unsavory people, but lifting them up as role models is a bit much. With this story Jesus is triggering all of that anger and righteous indignation that we have when life is not fair.

How does it make you feel to be reminded of the unfair things that are happening in your life? Other people seem to have perfect children,

grandchildren, jobs, marriages, homes, and wisdom. We try to be good people, but sometimes it seems like God is blessing others with more than we get.

Now as we sit here in worship today, notice how hard it is to see or feel God when we remember all of these unfair things. Resentment and anger become barriers to experiencing the love of God that is around us. Our very human sense of fairness and justice is an impediment to spirituality. It is very hard to be in healthy relationship with God, other, and self when we demand that God and the world be fair.

Letting go of our demand of God may seem like a moot point, since I have already pointed out that life and death are not fair. However, there are mental and spiritual benefits to letting go of the demand. Anger and resentment can become insidious and take over our lives. They can get inside of us, and their noise can drown out so many other good things in life. Whether you are a dog lover or not, here is a dog illustration. "When you feel dog tired at night, it may be because you've growled all day long. Holding on to the demand that life be fair and its associated anger can be exhausting.

What keeps you from letting go of the angry demand that God be fair?

Is it that someone needs to be punished for bad behavior or you need to be rewarded for good behavior?

If you let go, does it feel like the world will never know of the bad thing that happened?

If you let go of the demand for fairness does it feel like you yourself don't matter? You don't merit respect or attention?

One last question, has your demand for fairness been effective? If it has then keep going, but for most of us our lives would be much better if we loosen the grip that the demand has on our lives. Lewis Smedes said, "to forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

And E. H. Chapin wrote, “never does a human soul appear so strong as when it foregoes revenge, and dares forgive an injury.”

Notice that I switched to forgiveness with these quote. I think there is a strong correlation and tension between our demand for fairness and forgiveness. They go hand in hand.

And this gets us to the Cross. One of the eternal truths of our Christian spirituality is that Jesus entered the world as a baby boy and died on the Cross. He entered into a world which is not fair. Jesus suffered because of that unfairness and then with his resurrection he let go of his need for fairness. Jesus demonstrates that the universe is not meaningless and absurd just because it isn't perfectly logical, fair or consistent. This is a truth we need to embrace.

With this morning's parable, Jesus demonstrates that it is the very nature of God to forgive and forgive and forgive even when it doesn't seem fair. Jesus elevates forgiveness above fairness. The dishonest manager gets better than he deserves. And by extension, we do as well. This is the practical message we get from Jesus today on how to live into the Kingdom of God. So, what are the things in your life that keep you from accepting that life and death are not fair?