

## **Homily – Life and Death Are Not 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.

Tomorrow many around the world will pause their busy lives to remember and celebrate the life and death of Queen Elizabeth. With her seventy year reign as Queen of the British Commonwealth, many of us have never known of a time when Elizabeth wasn't Queen. There aren't many monarchs left in the world, and for many Queen Elizabeth was the exemplar. She wasn't perfect but she seems to embody a level headed calmness and stability that are sorely needed in our world. My own impressions of the Queen have been formed by the Netflix series, "The Crown." At least in that fictional depiction, Queen Elizabeth comes across as hard working, selfless, and wise. On the other hand at times she seems to add glamor and legitimacy to some of the ugly parts of unbridled capitalism and colonialism. Queen Elizabeth is one of the most privileged people who has ever lived, and she is a good case study for us as we wrestle with the complexities of fairness. Is it fair for one person or family to have that much money and prestige? Is it fair for the Queen to carry the burdens of a country and to be forced to repress her own opinions and thoughts for the good of the country? Is it fair to have a monarchy? This is all complex stuff. Fairness is not simple.

When you get down to it, 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 of the world. 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 that 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? 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, others, 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 unfair thing that happened to you?

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 or fairness?

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. And in another paradox, I wonder if the letting go of a demand for fairness, brings a little more fairness into the world?

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?

And, while it may not be fair, I am going to end this sermon today with a prayer for Queen Elizabeth. The Lord be with you. And also with you. Let us pray.

Almighty God, You are the author and sustainer of all human life; grant that your servant, Elizabeth, whom you granted a long and happy reign as Monarch may be forgiven her sins and rewarded with that eternal life promised to all by Jesus. Eternal rest, grant to Elizabeth O God, and let light perpetual shine upon her. May she rest in peace. May her soul, and the souls of all the departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.