

Faith Life Weekly (for the week of November 20)

Fuzzy Math

“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

I had a roommate in college with what we used to call “a real major” (electrical engineering), which meant that he had to take a lot of advanced math, science, and logic work. He tried to explain to me one day this theory that proves, technically, that one plus one does not in fact equal “2.” But this kind of complicated arithmetic pales in comparison to the mathematics of God’s grace. One repentant sinner worth more than 99 good, courteous, law-abiding folks. One belligerent wino worth more than 99 elders and trustees of the community. But God delights in transforming us, and seeing something completely new come about. Remember how it all begins, the Bible? Ok, fine, after the table of contents and the page that says it was given to you as a gift from your parents. Yup – it starts with creation. More to the point, it starts with a creator; a creator who brings all things into being and calls them “good.” In our case, he calls us “very good.” What we sometimes lose in those first chapters as we ponder the length of six days in that time and what is literal vs. what is figurative, is that God is one who likes to bring new life – to forever re-shape and glory through the objects of his affection (i.e. – all of us). God the creator wants to do what creators live for – to create; to bring something completely new that wasn’t seen before. For this reason, God’s grace extends itself even at the risk of rejection and humiliation in the Christ and in his body, the Church, so that new creation can continue. For our God, what could possibly be more important than that.

And to see it happen is to know what Luke is talking about. I’ve prayed the Lord’s Prayer with everyone from small children up to those over 100 years old. I’ve prayed it in other languages. I’ve prayed it in churches, homes, stadiums, and outdoors. I’ve prayed it passionately, joyously, and sleepily. But none of these stand out like hearing a 17 year old in prison for stabbing two acquaintances pray it and mean it for the first time, choking out each line between the tears. “Forgive us our trespasses as, Oh God, please forgive me. Lord, help me.” It was not at all exactly as it’s found in the scriptures or the church traditions, but it never sounded quite so sweet.

Have a blessed Thanksgiving weekend, and make the most of appreciating the undeserved gifts of God in your life.

Pastor Bill