

Providence Forge Presbyterian Church

Lenten Devotional Week Three: Grace

February 28, 2021

...I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

1 Corinthians 9:22

O God, give us an open mind and heart to listen to people of other faiths, with the expectation that we will have an opportunity to bear witness to our own faith. Amen.

Ty Cobb's nickname was "The Georgia Peach" because of his southern roots and his versatility as a "peach" of a player. He could do everything: lead the league in hitting, steal bases with vengeance, and play a superb outfield position. He became one of the greatest players in the game.

Paul the apostle was not a narrow-minded man. He was proud of his Hebrew background, but he was also willing to reach out to the Gentile world despite all the adaptations he would have to make. He became all things to all people so that he might win some to the gospel. Listen to someone's personal story before sharing your own.

By Richard A. Hasler as published in These Days: Daily Devotions for Living by Faith 2016

Submitted in memory of Howard Gammon

Grace in the Garden

Well, if we want to eat fresh peas from our garden, we better get busy. It's time to sow the seeds. And, if we want a good harvest, we can get one by sowing a bountiful portion of seeds. The *rule of returns* holds true here. Jesus taught that we reap what we sow. Sow generously, reap abundantly. Sow in a stingy manner, reap a meager crop. What is true in our own gardens is also true in the garden of Life. For example, if we desire lives full of mercy and kindness, that's what we need to sow in life around us. Just as the beatitude indicates: the merciful reap a crop of mercy in their own lives. Our creative God has shown such grace in ordering Life along the lines of the *rule of returns*. We can, using our own Divinely given creativity, have a huge impact in shaping our lives to be full of mercy and abundance!

Divine grace, however, is much more rich and complex than the *rule of returns*! For example, going back to our garden: one year a close friend of mine was rapidly approaching the end of his earthly life. I got the strange impulse (Divine Leading?) to take him a red rose every day. We had a small rose garden which really had not been well tended. But, what a surprise! Every day for about a month there appeared a red bloom for my friend. We could say that it was just a good year for roses, but this had never happened before, or since! I was reaping far better than I had sown! It was like the parable of the prodigal son was happening in our garden.

By going into the far country that boy had sown a really poor crop. Yet, by the grace of God, he reaped an abundant, merciful harvest! It seems unethical to most people that he should be so richly received back into the good graces of his father. It goes against the *rule of returns*. But, perhaps the father knew that his son needed to get lost in a far country to find himself. In the parable, Jesus indicates that he 'came to himself' while there, and turned around to come home. If we consider well, perhaps each of us can cite occasions where God went way beyond the *rule of returns* in our own lives, and showered us with the rich graces of a mercy and abundance we didn't deserve. For those who are awake to the Divine, ***it is all grace in the garden of life!***

By Hal Wallof

Forgiveness

One of the hardest things a Christian is called to do is grant forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift to us from God through Jesus so that one day we may come into His presence. It is also a gift that we may go through life unburdened by the sins of others against us. Those with a conscience will ask for our forgiveness and we grant it and move on. Those without one do us harm and do not care. If we don't forgive them, we carry their wrong with us and it becomes a burden on us, but it will have no effect on the person who committed the sin. But if we forgive, we no longer carry that burden – we let God deal with that person. So, forgiveness is a gift to us whether we committed the sin, or it was committed against us. The following is something else to consider:

When we are unforgiving, we are saying that God's justice is not enough.

Unforgiveness is saying that God's justice is insufficient. If we refuse to forgive an unbeliever, we are saying that Hell is not enough. If we refuse to forgive a believer, we are saying that Christ's sacrifice is not enough. Unforgiveness is claiming that God's justice is just not enough. If we refuse to forgive anyone, we are saying that my sins are forgiven but not yours. And it is saying to God, yes, your standards have been met but my standards are higher than yours. *

I can think of many events covered by the news media over the past year that should anger any person of faith. It is easy to get wrapped up in the frenzy but remember, God will judge them. When I struggle to forgive, I return to the words above and those found in Mathew Chapter 7.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” Matthew 7:1-2 [ESV]

By Pete Adamson

**An excerpt from the sermon God Meant it for Good by Anthony Mathenia, 11-8-2020.*