

## **“It’s All About Remembering”**

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church  
for the Fifth Sunday After Pentecost, July 9, 2017

Joint Service with St. Mark’s United and St. Peter’s United Churches

**Scripture Readings:** Psalm 145: 8-14.17-19, 21

Matthew 11: 25-30

(Sermon by Catherine Somerville)

I almost forgot the lesson. At first glance, when I took a look at this week’s teaching offered by Jesus, I thought it was his call for all of us to take off on a holiday this afternoon. We will slap on the sunscreen, find a cool place to sit, pour ourselves glasses of iced tea, and enjoy the rest of the day.

What I forgot, was that - as with most things Jesus says - there is always more than you read at the first glance. This is not so much a call for freedom from work as it is an invitation to let go of the weariness that tugs at one’s soul. Weariness comes when we do work that we are not suited for. It comes when we try to meet on-going and pressing deadlines, or working out of a sense fear or futility. Weariness comes when we think we have nothing to do, or in those times when we believe that nothing we do will make a difference.

What got me remembering, though, was a passing encounter I had this week in one of the shops here in the downtown. I had popped in quickly. I’m not exactly sure how I got to talking with the person behind the counter, but that happens to me a lot, so I am not surprised anymore. She gave me the gift of a story. And she helped me remember how God’s love can come to any of us at the most unlikely times, and that our task is to travel with awareness. It’s all about adjusting your perspective.

Her story is that every once in a while, she gets to feeling rather “world weary”. She didn’t go into details, but it sounded to me like her life is heavy. When the weight of her circumstances starts to feel burdensome, she sets a goal for herself. By the end of the day she is going to do five unexpected acts of kindness for other people. As she goes through the day, she keeps her eyes open for chances to help. If she makes it to her home at the end of the day, and she still has one more unexpected kindness to offer, she has to go into the kitchen and bake something and take it to someone in her apartment building. If she has done nothing kind all day, she has to do five lots of baking and widen the scope of her delivery.

The other day, she was on the way home, and she stopped at the grocery store. She knew in the back of her mind that she had one more kindness to extend, but she didn’t want to have to bake because she was really tired. She knew she had to find the opportunity in the store. She was standing in line behind two people, a father and son, and it was rather obvious from the things the dad was buying that this was a weekend dad. The wait was taking a bit more time than expected, and the little boy was getting a bit anxious. He started to run his hands along the chocolate bars that were within easy reach of a little boy.

He turned to his dad, and asked for a chocolate bar. The answer was “No, there is candy at home.”

“Not chocolate though dad. We don’t have chocolate at home. Can I please have a chocolate bar?”

“No, son.”

The woman from the store recognized an opportunity. She tapped the dad on the shoulder and she told him about this pact she had made with herself, about times when she felt weary and about doing five kind things because she knew that we have to feel more in life than weariness and grumpiness. She asked if she could buy the boy a chocolate bar. The dad shook his head “no”, just as the eyes of the boy lit up “yes”. In the end, she told me that she had been able to buy the chocolate bar, the three of them ended up giggling and talking outside the store for a couple minutes, but the best news of the story from her point of view, was that she was the one saying the biggest thank you for the chance to offer a kindness, because she really had not wanted to go home and bake that night. With a grin on her face, she told me that she was such a selfish person.

It’s always the second glance of a story that invites our consideration. That woman reminded me of the need to pay attention, and be on the lookout for signs of God’s care that are as present and beautiful as the flight of a butterfly. The second glance at the Jesus story is a reminder that we are called to live with a conscious awareness that we do not carry the burdens of our lives alone. So much happens in life that makes you try and forget that. And when you forget, you begin to think like the rest of the world, that you always need to be strong and in control, that asking for help is a sign of weakness, that it’s better to do all the talking than take the time to listen, that you never, ever let other people know that you are scared or you don’t know the answer to the question.

Jesus offers us another way. He is inviting his followers to a life of fullness, aware that his presence is right beside us. Carrying the load by yourself will wear you out. When you know that you are not carrying the load alone, and that there is help, then the traveling is easier, and the weight seems lighter. When I carry groceries home by myself, my arms are usually pretty tired after the walk. When Jack and I each carry one handle of the grocery bag, and we talk all the way home, the burden is cut in half.

“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.” The easy yoke he offers is remembering that we called to live with bigger vision. It invites us to be more than we think we can be. And it is all motivated by a passionate desire to see God’s kingdom realized, and know that we are working towards God’s dream.

Gennifer Benjamin Brooks wrote a wonderful book about becoming aware of God’s grace in the most unexpected moments of our lives. She defines grace in a number of ways in this book. It’s God filling up the empty spaces in our living. It is God’s love given to us when we don’t really think we deserve it. It is the reminder that we are not alone.

Let me read you one of passages. She writes, “The kingdom of heaven, the community of God, is inhabited by those who understand that they exist in a circle of grace. The circle

begins and ends with God, the author of all grace. Jesus included among his companions sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors like the gospel writer Matthew, the rejected, women, the downtrodden. His grace is extended like his arms on the cross, but his message is that God's grace not only extends to all, but that all are called to be both receivers and givers of grace. It is the glue that holds the community of Christ together. Don't count how many times you have to forgive. Just forgive, until you forget to count. Don't try to estimate how much money you have in your pocket and how many times you have been approached by someone on the street. Just buy the coffee. In this community, there is no keeping track of how many times, and you never stop looking for ways to be the arms of Christ."

Knowing this allows us to live together in Christian community. This is the knowledge that enables each one of us to come to worship, week after week, to put our names on the prayer list, and ask that people hold us in prayer when we are feeling world weary. It enables us to pray for others, to stand together and sing hymns of praise. It enables us to listen to a common story, and take from that scripture what we need to make it through the rest of the day. It enables us to sit with those who are broken, to wait with those who are anxious. I would add, that it sometimes gives a weekend dad, a little boy, and a tired out salesclerk something to smile about.

It's not always easy. It's not easy to show grace to someone who deliberately and cruelly causes you pain, or someone who just seems to make your life difficult. It is not easy to exhibit grace when you are the victim of discrimination, when racism, or sexism or homophobia or ageism, and all the other "isms" of life in this world beat down upon you. But that's the remembering piece... Yes, it isn't always easy. But Christians know that Jesus calls us in the fullness of love, that we are loved first by God, and when we remember that, our lives are enriched beyond measure.

There is so much that I have left undone, things attributed to me that I have not done. Yet I know that I have made the choice to live in Christian community, and it is the grace of God that reminds me to try and not to keep count of wrongs, but to keep working at a covenant of love. It's not my doing. It is allowing for openness in my living, and the awareness that there is more going on than I clue into sometimes. The grace is in knowing that I am not alone. Today, Jesus is inviting us to hold others in the space of our hearts, for he has made plenty of space for us.

Sources used:

The Seeds of Heaven: Reflections on the Gospel of Matthew, Barbara Brown Taylor, Westminster Press, 2004, pages 17-21.

Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3, pages 203-217.

Unexpected Grace, Preaching Good News From Difficult Texts, Gennifer Benjamin Brooks, Pilgrim Press, 2012, page 93.