

“An Old Song – A New Carol”

2 Corinthians 12:6-10 Msg

“Ya gets what you deserve”. “You made your bed, now lie in it”.

Seems reasonable, doesn't it? At least if you're the one lying in the bed, blaming yourself for the way the bed got made. Or if you're the one with cists on your pancreas, because of drug and alcohol abuse. Or lung cancer because of a smoking addiction. We get what we pay for. And that's it. Not a lot of good news there, my friends.

And then we hear, “what did I do to deserve this?” from the lips of someone who never smoked a day in her life and just received a diagnosis of lung cancer. What about the battle with liver disease from someone who never touched a drop? What about crippling arthritis, or MS, or sudden blindness from a virus? “What *did* we do to deserve this?” The question lingers in the air beside the statement “Ya gets what you deserve” and none of it makes sense. And none of it has even a trace of good news attached.

At least the “ya gets what you deserve” has some logic, a cause and effect rationale. So in one way it does make sense. But there is no good news to be found in that way of thinking. No redemption. No second chance. Although totally different, getting what no logical explanation would support *doesn't* make sense.

How many times have we waded through the deep waters of trying to understand why “bad things happen to good people” and we get stuck, mired in what feels like the unfairness of it all. So whether we think we deserve what has happened in our lives, or whether we can't understand what has happened in our lives, the only thing in common is that there is no good news in either way of thinking.

If Christian faith is described as Gospel, or ‘good news’, then we're going to have to venture into the “doesn't make sense” zone and look for the good news. On the surface it doesn't seem to be there. But, it's what Christmas is all about. It's not just about the Baby in the Manger, it's what that Baby came to bring to all people: the ones who carry the burden of feeling that they deserve what they're getting, *and* the ones who feel they don't deserve what they're getting.

Remember, announcing the birth of Jesus, the angel said:

“Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news** that will cause great joy for **all** the people.” Luke 2:10 NIV

That would be *all* the people. Good news for all the people! That would be each one of us. And, I think that once we stop trying to “make sense” of it, we can relax and discover the core of the Good News, which is Grace. Amazing, extravagant, irrational, all-inclusive Grace! *That* is the good news! We don’t, we can’t earn the second or the forty-fifth chance. Because of Jesus, because He came, the grace, or “charism” – meaning gift, is ours. Free. There is nothing we can do to either make God love us more, or love us less.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.
Ephesians 2:8,9 NIV

And that’s not just for the “entry” into a relationship with God. That is the whole essence of the relationship. What God has done. What God is doing. Every aspect of our lives undergirded by grace. The Apostle Paul understood that well. As Beth read to us ... He had “a handicap to keep him in constant touch with his limitations.” Paul says that he had asked God to remove it three times. This was the Paul who had preached, prayed, healed and been a tower of spiritual strength. Yet, this handicap – whatever it was – remained. But, although he wasn’t relieved of his handicap, healed, or set free from it, he heard God say:

“My grace is enough; it’s all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9 Msg

“My grace is all you need”. Wow! We can’t earn it. It is a gift. And it’s ours for the taking. By faith, we just need to reach out and take it for absolutely every situation in our lives. Regrets? Swallowed up in “grace”. Guilt? Eradicated by “grace”. Weakness? Strengthened by “grace.” Sorrow? Comforted by “grace.” Sin? Exceeded by “grace”. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He paid the price so now it’s His gift to us.

I can imagine if Paul were here today, he would be talking to us about exactly the same thing. In fact, he might just say it in these words:

Matt: He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials He multiplies peace.
His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources

Our Father's full giving is only begun.
His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.ⁱ

Doug: For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

For me, the truly Good News of Christmas is knowing that God loved His creation so much that Jesus came. God in human flesh. And through Him came the gift of grace, which Paul says is "enough" for all our needs, available for every situation that touches our humanity – from our "lostness" to our ability to cope in our "foundness". That's why I think the old song, "Amazing Grace" should be a Christmas Carol. Let's sing it:

ⁱ Text: Annie Johnson Flint. Music: Hubert Mitchell. Copyright 1941, renewed 1969 Lillenas Publishing Co.