

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Friday, December 24th, 2021, Christmas Eve
Isaiah 9:2-7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-20

I was thinking I could see Hollywood turning one of Jesus' most popular parables into a tv Christmas movie of the week. The parable of the prodigal son, or as some choose to call it, the parable of the forgiving father.

We think of Christmas as a time for peace, but also grace and mercy. And that grace and mercy are not always just and to some feel unfair. Phillip Yancey tells of a preacher changing the story so that the elder son is the one who gets the party, and someone in the congregation shouts, that's the way it should be. Unjust and unfair. Yancey and others have even gone as far as to say that forgiveness is unnatural.

And the father in fact does not forgive the prodigal son but welcomes him without forgiveness at all. The son tries to confess but the father goes ahead with the feast and robe for him.

In other words, there is no naughty list at Christmas.

And in case you're wondering, it isn't just the parable of the prodigal son, there are other examples of grace and mercy and care that are not practical. What comes to mind is the parable of the vineyard, with the master of the vineyard hiring people at different times through the day and paying them all the same day's wage even though some only worked an hour, and they were paid first so those who worked all day saw how much they were paid like them.

And the parable of the lost sheep. As Phillip Yancey says, leaving the ninety-nine to look for the one, then come back and twenty-five are now gone. And my thought, then going to look for them as well. A constant looking for those who are lost in some way.

Or as Richard Rohr challenges us to love wastefully. God is always loving us and others wastefully, so that we too are challenged to do so as well.

Maybe Christmas is the time which reminds us that God does love us wastefully and unconditionally, and we are called to love each other as much as possible in the same way. But it is unrealistic for us to do this all the time, but for this short period of time we can feel this love from God and pass it on in some form to others, and for none of us to be on the naughty list.

At the beginning of the Gospel, we have Luke mention Emperor Augustus and Quirinius was governor of Syria.

But the angels come to the lowly shepherds and proclaim
*Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom God favours*

Not only is there no one on the naughty list at Christmas, but whom does God favour? It seems it is the shepherds rather than the emperor and the governor.

Before we get upset and think that it is ok to keep on doing what we know is wrong without trying to change, there is an ancient story about God and us by Meister Eckhart:

" God holds each of us by a string. When we sin, we cut the string. But God ties it up again, making a knot. Each time our wrongdoing cuts the string, God ties another knot drawing us up closer to Him. "

Amen

Covid prayer:

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.