



August 2, 2020

LIFE is a Parable!

From the beginning of June until the end of November the Gospel readings have been and will continue to be from Matthew. Back in the day when Robert Duke was the professor of Worship and Preaching at Lancaster Theological Seminary, I learned for the first time that we receive the new texts for the week on Sunday and are invited to live into them throughout the week. That was so helpful and yet challenging for pastors who prepare worship and write sermons. They are living in one text for one week while looking ahead and doing study of another text for the upcoming Sunday.

Matthew is inviting us to live into the messages of parables. Sometimes they are puzzling stories that use metaphor as a way of describing the best and worst of humanity and yet there is a gem with a sliver of grace in what is possible. There is harsh language in some and yet there is also hope. They can conjure up curiosity and perhaps slow us down to ponder meaning instead of rushing through a story because we think we know what it is teaching us. Sometimes the parables are so familiar we don't even consider there may be something new for us to glean.

Parables are not just short stories. As I read obituaries of people who have died, life as a parable has become more evident. When my cousin Krikor was in a motorcycle accident in the late 60's he became totally dependent on my aunt for everything. He lived that way for over 40 years, eventually dying in a nursing home because she became too old and unable to physically handle his needs. They were members of the Armenian Orthodox Church. I will never forget what the priest said in his homily at the funeral. He asked... "What did Krikor's life teach you?"

You see, he understood why people were sharing stories about how wonderful my aunt had been all those years. He understood the speed with which people would jump to language that almost pitied Krikor's life. He also understood that there was more to Krikor's life than his surviving that accident only to live in such a dependent state. It was as if his life ended in value once he couldn't produce what we as a society value...human production and success. Such it is in patriarchal capitalistic systems. However, in the Kingdom of God...all life has value and all life is a story...all life is a parable. So, what did Krikor teach us?

My sister and I laughed and cried as we answered that question on the way to the cemetery. Krikor taught us what it meant to have fun, to let people share themselves with others, to offer care, to be patient, to listen, appreciate what we could do but not pity someone else's limitations. The list goes on. I think you get the picture. LIFE as a parable is real.

In one week, two Civil Rights icons died. Rev. C.T. Vivian and John Lewis. I was mindful throughout the day when there was no mention of their deaths and when there were friends posting pictures they had taken with John Lewis specifically, on several occasions. The testimonies of their lives expand decades. They both died before they could see the full manifestation of their life work. I just hope they died knowing that the parable of their lives created generations of people who are committed to seeing what they hoped for will indeed be accomplished.

If we only mark their lives with quotes on our social media walls, we limit the understanding of the parable of their life work. What did they teach us? What gifts did they leave us? What honor can we bring to the memory of all they accomplished this side of heaven?

Parables are meant to be studied. LIFE is a parable to be lived and then understood as our best teachers. I give thanks for all the lessons these men taught me. Jesus asked us to remember him and that whatever we do to the least of these we do it to him. May we remember these great saints and in our remembering, may the lessons learned and the actions of our own lives be a parable that transforms the world so that dreams of the Kingdom of God...the Beloved Community will indeed be manifested in our lifetimes. Because at the end of the day...even your LIFE is a parable. When you die...what will your life teach?

Blessings and Peace,
Susan

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Photo of the John Lewis mural designed by Sean Schwab taken by Susan Minasian on the 2018 Charlottesville Civil Rights Pilgrimage.