

Twenty-sixth Sunday – September 27, 2015

If we learn anything from today's Scriptures, maybe we ought to learn this: God is always bigger than our group and our plans. God is free to pour out grace and power on anyone who will use them for good. It's not you or I who is important, it's the work of God. The ever-present danger for human beings like us is to get caught up in the status game, acting as if we are a kind of exclusive club in which only bona fide members have the right to promote the work of God. God's grace is unruly. As Pope Francis has said: "God accomplishes his will in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking" (The Joy of the Gospel, #22).

So how do we get out of our own way and make Jesus a priority in our lives? Jesus could have told us to remove any impediment that keeps us away from himself. We wouldn't flinch if we heard words like that. Instead we hear some grisly metaphors about lopping off hands and feet, and gouging out eyes. What do we make of this kind of language?

Let's say two things. First, let's say clearly that Jesus does not mean for us to take him literally. The disciples of Jesus knew that. We know it too. Go into any of the strictest Bible-believing churches you can find, and I'll bet you won't find lots of people with eye patches and wrapped stumps for limbs. Even though we are not invited to take Jesus literally here, we are invited to take him seriously. Here's how, in this second point.

If our primary distraction is grasping after material things, then we need to exercise spiritual discipline over our hands. What should we be letting go of? If our primary distraction is wanting to walk only with those who are the "in crowd", then we must exercise spiritual discipline over our feet, going wherever God sends us. If our primary distraction is coveting every desirable thing we see, then we need spiritual discipline over our eyes so we can focus on the things of God.

So where do we start with all this? Jesus tells us. Someone who gives a glass of water to a thirsty brother or sister will not lose their reward. It's a good place to start. If we can see someone's thirst, we begin to see other needs as well. Small beginnings can lead to transformation. On judgment day we will learn what we already know, that every human being is part of one family. Everyone belongs inside the circle and at the table.

If each one of us brings just one other person to that table and to God, everyone will be there. A small cost to pay for gaining entrance into our true home.