

Hard Word Has to Be Shared September 20, 2020

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Text: Matthew 20:1-16

It has been yet another hard weekend for us all as we mourn the loss of Ruth Bader Ginsburg...a hard weekend on top of a year already full of fear, loss, isolation, pain. *pause*

It sometimes feels so odd to ask folx, how are you doing? When deep down I can already feel the answer before I even asked them. And yet that question still feels incredibly important to ask. More times than I expect, I hear, “good”... And I think that “good” stems from I am alive, this moment feels okay, I can handle this...

what it means to be “good” feels like it has vastly changed.

In these past 6 months...

So many have lost jobs, continue to experience job instability or have taken a temporary leave without pay because the job is not safe, many have lost loved ones to covid or other illnesses because our medical care systems are overwhelmed, many who no longer have a home (and the many who been on the streets before and during covid who had nowhere safe to go), many experiencing worsening physical and mental health symptoms, many who have not seen loved ones or felt the touch of another human being in months, many who have loved ones out west who cannot leave their homes because of the smoke, many who have lost their homes in the fires...list goes on...

Our lives have been completely flipped upside down and continue to be. And it is exhausting... We all have bags under our eyes. But no matter how much time passes, no matter how much our reality right now becomes “normalized” –it is never too redundant to say– this sucks.

I saw some of my family in August in Jersey for one day. I hadn't seen them since Christmas... we had plans to see each other in March before everything happened. Never in my life did I think that I could put my own mother in danger by giving her a hug. Yet, this is the world we live in...

Yes, all of our experiences are very different. Some have been hit a lot harder... especially when we confront socio-economic statuses and the massive economic inequalities and the alarming health realities of how covid has disproportionately devastated black and brown communities.

Deep within all these vastly different experiences, Covid has managed to touch all of our lives.

As we hold all of this, we turn to scripture today, we hear what heaven is like. It is like this vineyard...I imagine this magnificent, beautiful huge land, covered in grape vines, full of warm sunshine, free of masks and social distancing...

And as we read, on this vineyard, we learn that the owner of this vineyard hired workers throughout the day. At the end of the day, they were all paid the same – including the ones that worked the WHOLE day in the scorching heat and the ones who just worked the last hour. When the workers who arrived first discovered this, they complained to the owner.

I am sure many, if not most of us, can empathize with the complaining workers. Maybe we felt like we did most of the work, whether in a job, in a relationship... we were the ones laboring all day in the scorching heat, building resentment and I bet at times many of us have also been the workers who worked the last hour... and perhaps felt uncomfortable, guilt that we had so many things on our plate, maybe even underserving in some way...

The question that bubbles to the surface for me when I read this parable is... what does it look like to be in divine relationship, in right relationship with one another? And what does this look like, now?

The best marriage advice I ever received ... and advice that I also try to apply to all my relationships was... relationships are almost never 50/50. 50/50 is organized, it's neat, but life and relationships are beautiful and they are messy. Sometimes we are the ones putting in 80 or 90% and sometimes we are the ones putting in 10%. Maybe a loved one is having a hard and busy week and we take on the tasks of grocery shopping, preparing meals, laundry, emotional support...maybe we are the ones that are *up to here* and a friend steps in to take care of us.

It is almost impossible in life for people to put in the exact same amount of work at the exact same time.

As we think about these relationships, I do caution all of us to keep in mind social identities... more often than not it is the women, the people of color, the queer and trans folx, the people with less money in their pockets in our world that work 99%... but this will lead me into a different sermon. I just ask that we carry this with us...]

RBG also publicly shared the best advice she was given before she married. On her wedding day, right before the ceremony, her mother in law said, "Ruth, I would like to tell you the secret of a happy marriage.... It helps every now and then to be a little deaf. So if an unkind or thoughtless word is spoken you just tune it out. You don't hear it. RBG said, "Now that is advice I followed in marriageand when dealing with my colleagues"

My cat Mr. Bumble has become my co-worker at home and I wonder if he overheard RBG's advice... and just took it to the extreme...I think he tunes out most of what I say.

This advice is funny AND it also recognizes each of our own imperfections...to be a little deaf...to do our best to not let stress or simply a bad day overshadow who a person is and can be.

What I believe this parable (and the pieces of life advice I shared) are reminding us- is that hard work is shared and that it has to be shared. It cannot be done alone. The vineyard is expanding to include more and more workers each day. *pause*

As I am sure most of you heard, RBG's final wishes were that that her vacancy on the court will not be filled until a new president is able to fill it"

I know her vacancy is a shadow that haunts and scares many of us, if not all of us. Rightfully so because there is so much at stake. She fought until her last breath... to project women's rights, lgbtq rights, immigrant rights, labor rights, health care, the environment... so much more.

But may her vacancy and our fears not drive us to despair, but rally us to fight for her legacy... to continue to take on the work and share the responsibility of protecting each other's rights, of ensuring that each and every life is valued, cherished and loved.

One specific action we can all do today, together, is to check our voting registration status. Each and every one of us. Help our friends and families check their voting status. You can go to headcount.org to do it.

Then come up with a plan. Are you voting by mail? Are you going in person? If you are voting in person, did you take the time off from work that you need? Did you coordinate caregiving? We must help each other to register and to create plans. Our voices and what we think – matters. Together, we can get more people out there voting. This is just one concrete example of shared labor. And it takes all of us to do it.

If this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we need each other. We *desperately* need each other.

We need each other to survive these times. To survive covid. To survive a deeply divided nation.

To stop police brutality. To stop mass incarceration. To stop the wild fires. To stop the rising sea levels.

We need each other to save the planet. We need each other to create a more just and loving world for all of God's precious creation.

On the vineyard, the workers who worked all day could not have accomplished what they did without the workers who helped in the last hour.... And the workers who arrived later in the day could not have accomplished what they did without the workers who started working in the morning.

At different times we will be the workers working for an hour and the workers working the whole day ---- because this involves all of us. Sometimes we can only give 10% and sometimes we can give 90%. That does not make any of the work we do any less significant.

And sometimes we need to be just a little deaf – forgiving towards the occasional unkind words that stem from exhaustion and sadness.

And when will it be enough? When we asked RBG when will there be enough women on the Supreme Court? She said, it will be enough when all 9 justices are women.

The journey is long and the journey is hard. And the journey is worth it.

And this call to lean on one another, to share social justice labor... is not a new one -

The Montgomery Bus Boycott... a civil rights movement in the 50s predominately led by black women... because it was women who were responsible for piecing and organizing all that tasks that ultimately held the movement together. Rosa Parks was not the only incredibly brave woman who refused to give up her seat on the bus for a white person, and was not the first... women like Mary Louise Smith and Claudette Colvin also refused to give up theirs before her. This mass movement led to the U.S. Supreme Court ordering Montgomery to integrate its bus system. This all happened because of brilliant organizing and brilliant distribution of shared work. Women have shown us what this can look like.

The Stonewall riots of 1969... when the police raided The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City. Drag queens, transwomen said "enough" and fought back, which led to a series of demonstrations and ultimately the queer and trans civil rights movement. Drag queens and transwomen have shown us what this can look like.

This is all part of our DNA as people. God has given each and every one of us gifts. All of us. We all have precious gifts to offer this world. You, yes, you, have gifts. Maybe you have been gifted with extra money in your pockets that you can donate, maybe you can write and inspire, maybe you can draw and create and empower, maybe you can lead heartfelt conversations that question and challenge, maybe you can shout from the streets, maybe you can cook and feed souls, maybe you can speak more than one language, maybe you can sing and create music and radiate hope, you each have a gift to share....a gift that is so needed in this work.

If you are willing, I invite you to close your eyes and take a breath. Imagine the vineyard in the parable. Imagine this heaven. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? God, the owner, has invited you here to work. To labor the land to bear grapevines that lead the way to justice and peace. The land is beautiful and it requires so much work. Work that you, yourself, cannot do alone. As you open your eyes, remember that you are not alone. There is a community here, this church, beside you that will toil the land with you. Every step of the way.

This is what I think it means to be in divine relationship, to be in right relationship with one another and with God. It is saying yes, when God invites to work on the vineyard, it is bringing our gifts with

us, vulnerably and courageously, it is holding one another... it is sharing the work... it is fighting for and empowering one another...and it is never giving up. Amen.