

## Connections

Some time ago I shared with you that the science of physics has come to believe that the most basic building block in the universe are unimaginably small strings that vibrate.

And as they vibrate, notes are created, so that at the most fundamental level, all that exists is music.

There is a companion theory to this so-called "string theory" which is called "fusion theory."

Fusion theory says that **relationship** is the fundamental characteristic of all that exists.

To exist is to be in relationship, to be connected, and, on the other hand, the very definition of "nothing" or "non-existence" is that which is not in relationship.

That's modern physics, and yet, as we hunker down and really listen to the odd and violent parable that Jesus gives us today, I'm wondering if Jesus smiles with appreciation at our scientific insight, as he's teaching us about what is truly and ultimately real.

He starts by telling us that the kingdom of God is something like a king who decides to throw a bash and he invites at first all of the "best" people.

The country club set, the bankers and the lawyers, the social up and comers, all of them get the invite.

And to a man and woman, these best folks find reasons to beg off, and some even get so agitated at being invited that they punch and even kill the messengers!

You see, these folks are so sure that they have life all figured out, so sure that their routine of advancing and conquering and succeeding, is the goal of life, that any invitation to a different way of being is deeply threatening; perhaps even frightening; and so they strike out at anyone offering a different way.

So the invitation goes out instead to every one; and by golly, this king means everyone!

While our text reads that "the good and the bad" are rounded up — in the original Greek, it's reversed, so that it's the "bad and the good" who are corralled, perhaps to

catch our eye that morals and laws and rules are not the prime mover when it comes to this king.

Something else is more important than even morals or creeds or rules or walking the straight and narrow.....

Think of the boy who blew his wad in far off countries, only to come home to a dad running with all his might to welcome him home....

Think of that one stupid sheep who's wandered into fox territory, only to be found by a shepherd foolish enough to leave 99 unattended in order to find the one.....

Then think of seeds being tossed every which way on good, bad and indifferent dirt; think of weeds and wheat growing together and that lousy IRS agent beating his chest before God while the good Episcopal priest stands front and center thanking God he's not like that slob....

Think of the hookers and tax scammers and pagan soldiers and filthy Samaritans who become the heroes in Jesus' stories .....think of these things as we try to get a whiff of what it is that Jesus wants us to smell, and where it is that Jesus is taking us.

Might these stories tell us that what really counts in life is not how well we behave, nor how successfully we avoid evil; but that maybe, just maybe, what really matters is that God insists on having a relationship with every last one of us, and it is that relationship, that connection, and not our virtues, that matters in the end.

Maybe that's why in the story of the people hired throughout the day to work the vineyard all get the same wage: whether you're Mother Theresa pulling the laboring oar the whole day long or Donald Trump, who has a death bed transformation, and shows up in the field at one minute before quitting time.

Everyone gets the same pay because the pay isn't the point.

The point is the relationship: the point is to be in the vineyard, to have a seat at the party table, and to drink the wine and eat the food that is God's good pleasure to give to us all.

In other words, it may be that what today's parable, what so many of Jesus' parables, are telling us, is that it's not all about walking the fine line of goodness, which is another way of saying "I got no problem earning my salvation," which is just another way of saying: "I don't need a savior since I can save myself," — it's really all

about saying "yes" to the gracious invitation of God; an invitation made to the whole world, an invitation to be God's friend.

Accept the fact that you are accepted and that's all there is to it.

Open your hand to the free grace, bought at great price, and that's all there is to it.

I'm pretty sure that some of you might be getting heartburn at that thought; I know it gives me heartburn.

If all I got to do is accept being accepted, why bother with trying to walk the straight and narrow?

Why bother with anything other than my own needs and pleasures?

And while we're at it, what kind of respectable God welcomes in all these miscreants just so he can have a party?

In short, what about justice?

What about a final reckoning?

What about just desserts?

A priest friend of mine tells me of her exasperation at her 4 year old son who says about nearly everything that upsets him: "That's not fair!"

He says it not only when he's denied that second serving of ice cream, but also when the sun goes down and he's still outside wanting to play, or when his favorite TV show is cancelled by the network, or if he's too short to reach the cookie jar. Debbie Blue.

And what so upsets my friend is that he's using the phrase in ways that don't really make sense: he doesn't know what the phrase means.

And my friend then says that maybe we're that way too when it comes to God and what God is after in us.

Maybe we use words like mercy and judgment without knowing what they actually mean to God.

Maybe like that small boy, we are tossing around concepts that we just don't get.

And maybe that's why the parables are so troubling, because they prop open our eyes to see things sort of the way God sees things, and mostly that kind of stinks.

Until we let go.

Because, when you get right to it, I'm not the bright shiny apple I like to think I am, and the thought of getting into the party just because it makes God happy, rather than as a reward I've somehow earned, well, it lets me exhale, it lets me relax, and it lets me have fun.

Which gets us back to the physics lesson that we started with; and it gets us to the end of the parable, about that fellow who shows up without wearing his tuxedo.

If all of reality is relationship, and the creator of all reality wants nothing more from us than to be in relationship with Him, with each other, then the only way to get to hell is to reject the relationship.

Hell by definition, just like evil by definition, has no independent reality — hell is an absence of relationship, evil is the absence of good.

As C. S. Lewis puts it: "All Hell is smaller than a pebble...[as a matter of fact,] if a butterfly swallowed all of Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or to have any taste." *The Great Divorce*, 122-3.

Or as the physicist says: "Connection ... may well be all there is to something. The only difference between something and nothing may be that something has connections, [that **something** has relationships]. **Something is connections.**" KC Cole, *The Hole in the Universe*, 163, quoting, Lee Smolin.

So the fellow with no tux?

Apparently he's the fellow who won't accept his acceptance, and failing that, there's nowhere else to go but into nothingness; yet if I'm reading Jesus correctly, even that decision need not be final — the party door is always open — if only we're ready to celebrate.

+amen

