

## **We Are All Broken**

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

September 13, 2020

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In our competitive society, it is important not to be on the bottom of society. As long as we have someone below us, even if we ourselves are towards the bottom, we can at least feel good about ourselves. At least I'm not a criminal, drug dealer, or felon. In fact, people near the bottom of society can be just as judgmental as those on the top. We all avoid the very bottom at all costs.

A man who could have done very well at the top of society, but chose not only to go towards the bottom of society, but went all the way to the very bottom is Bryan Stevenson. After receiving his law degree from Harvard, he headed south to serve the people who live in poverty and experience racial discrimination, including those living on death row. In his 2014 book *Just Mercy*, which was made into a movie last year, he wrote, "my years of struggling against inequality, abusive power, poverty, oppression, and injustice had finally revealed something to me about myself...it exposed my own brokenness...We are all broken by something." (289) There is something quite profound about that statement. Instead of patronizing those who are below us as if we are superior and they need us, it recognizes our common humanity. We are all broken and in need of mercy. It is very much the point of today's Gospel.

In Jesus' parable today, he tells the story of a servant begging to be forgiven of his large debt to the king. After being moved with compassion, the king agrees and forgives the large debt. Fast forward

and that very same servant then runs into a fellow servant who owed him a small one. Instead of paying it forward, he demands his money be paid back. Even after the fellow servant asked for forgiveness (using very similar words that he used with the king), he refuses. Does not this servant demonstrate the very point that we never want to be on the very bottom of society? Is this not a failure of him to recognize his own brokenness? He used his fellow servant as a way to prop himself up, even though he was really in the same boat as his fellow servant.

All of us in the human family have been forgiven a great deal by God, who is represented as the king in the parable. We, like the servants, are to forgive each other for our much smaller offenses. The desire to make ourselves feel better by finding others to be lower than us was the sin of the servant. He could not see himself in his fellow servant. The starting point to being able to forgive our brothers and sisters from our heart is to see our common brokenness, not to see society as a competition. Even if we are not on the very bottom of society, all of us could easily be there through one mistake or one unjust structure.

*We are all broken and all in need of mercy.*

Do I show as much mercy as I receive?

Making ourselves feel better by ensuring that there are people below us is not the Gospel. The Gospel is that all of us need mercy and that mercy should be available not just 7 times, but 77 times.