



Thoughts on the Journey

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It was 1965 when the movie, *The Sound of Music* was released. The musical extravaganza hit the big screen when I was 10 years old. I have vivid memories of the excitement the movie generated, especially in the Catholic world. It was the talk of the town and everyone I knew wanted to see it. Normally, things that were the talk of the town didn't always spark the same interest at home because my parents were trying to raise a house full of kids and there were other priorities. But, *The Sound of Music* was the exception!

One evening, after my father came home from work, he and my mother surprised the older children in the family, "Get your good clothes on, your father is taking you to see the *Sound of Music*!". I could hardly believe my ears! Much to my dismay, we weren't going to the little Covedale theater up the street, we were actually going downtown to the big theater with the huge screen! The evening was already magical, but it was about to get far better than I could have imagined. When the movie began and Julie Andrews burst into song spinning herself around in the Alps, I wanted to be her! I wanted to be in the convent and then meet Christopher Plummer and fall in love! I even wanted to hide from the Nazis in the hills. I didn't want to be spared one morsel of the drama! Instead, what I got, was the soundtrack on a vinyl album for my birthday. It was just enough to keep my ten year old imagination locked in the fantasy and I played that album so many times that I knew every word of every song and over time, (in my ten year old delusional mind) I believe I sounded just like Julie Andrews.

Several years later at St. Teresa of Avila grade school, we were staging an all-school variety show. Each class was to feature a musical presentation; my class teachers chose the *Sound of Music*. There were to be tryouts for the various songs, and in my head, I knew I was the Julie Andrews they were looking for. I wasn't about to take any chances, so I prayed and prayed that they would choose me. "Surely, no one knows those songs better than me, Lord. You know how many hours I have spent getting to know the music. Pleeese, Lord, let me be the one they choose."

The day of tryouts came. Excitement was in the air. Then Sr. Mary Ann stood in front of the class and said, "Class, I have a surprise for you. Lisa Inskeep's mother is here with us today to help us decide who will be in the chorus." Lisa's mother was a professional

actress who performed in live productions in Cincinnati. After Sister Mary Ann introduced Lisa's mother, she continued her surprise with, "... and I am happy to announce that her daughter Lisa will be playing the part of Maria in our class production." I did everything I could to hold back the tears. The words, "This is so unfair", kept ringing through my head. I was so caught up in my disappointment that I could not be happy for my friend who wanted that part as much as I did.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples the parable of the landowner who hires laborers to work in his vineyard. Even though he hired them at different times of the day, he paid them all the same wage. When those who worked the entire day were paid the same amount as those laborers who only worked an hour, they grumbled against the landowner. The landowner said to them in reply,

My friend, I am not cheating you...take what is yours and go...am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

For many of us, our sense of fairness is based on wage-based thinking; you should get what you earn. Our world view is vastly different from the goodness of God which always takes into account his grace. In this way, grace and wages stand in opposition to one another. Society says self-worth is based on what we earn with our own merit and drive. God's grace, on the other hand, is given to us freely and is not based on how hard we work, how many degrees we have, how much we succeed or how much we fail. The pre-requisite to grace is to stand before God with open hearts and simply receive it. Grace-based living helps us to recognize our dependence on God and humbly accept that we are all the same in his eyes. We don't have to compete or compare ourselves to others or think that we are more or less deserving of God's love; we are loved unconditionally. Rather than creating division and resentment, God's generous grace unites us as the Body of Christ. No one has to lose in order to win. God gives freely so that everyone wins.

As far as being Maria in the *Sound of Music*? My friend Lisa did a beautiful job and, truth be known, God spared me from making a fool of myself. I landed a spot in the choir where God gave me the grace and humility to blend.