

## Envy Versus Blessedness

Proper 20, Year A, Track 2, RCL. Jonah 3:10—4:11. Matthew 20:1-6. The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost. September 24, 2017. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove

Today's Old Testament and Gospel readings are about the sin of envy. Jonah doesn't want God to bless the people of Nineveh. The vineyard workers who started earlier in the day don't want the workers who started later to receive the same wage they do. What envy doesn't want some other person or people to have is *blessedness*. Blessedness is the sum of the effects of someone (including God) being open-hearted toward others. Blessedness is very hard to handle if you are not in an open-hearted frame of mind. Blessedness can transform the envious person only if the envious person lets it bless them.

The best example I know of—and yes, it is a parable of envy converted by blessedness, or converted *to* blessedness—is *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. We all know the story. The Grinch envies the people of Whoville because they are happy at Christmas, but he can't get into the holiday because his heart is "two sizes too small." It may not have been the Grinch's fault that his heart is two sizes too small, but it was his fault that he wanted to hurt his neighbors for being joyful. He just couldn't stand the blessedness of normal-size hearts and all he could think to do was punish the people of Whoville. He doesn't want their stuff—he steals it just to drop it off Mount Crumpet like garbage. But when he sees that he can't stop their blessedness by subtracting their stuff, he begins to get it about blessedness: love and joy are fundamentally generous.

It isn't about what you have or get but about what you radiate, what you share, what you give away. Only about a small part of that is material gift-giving, decorations, food and so on. Mostly it's an attitude of appreciative, hopeful, helpful and bountiful joy and delight. We generally just call it love but it's a particular kind of love. It's the kind of love that makes worship real and family celebrations real and marriages real. It's what we mean by the spirit of Christmas. But it's really the Spirit of God Almighty, who—well, I was going to say invented it, but who really *is* it. The blessedness we radiate—when we open our hearts to grow to their best size—is a response to the appreciative, hopeful, helpful and bountiful joy and delight that blazes from God.