

Do you ever worry that you are not good enough? Do you ever worry that you let people down?

Arthur Gordon talks about how he struggled with issues of faithfulness at an early age, through the Lenten tradition of the "Mite" box in his church. Do you remember a "mite" box? It is a little box that children put money into throughout lent and it was taken to church on Easter and given as an Easter offering.

Arthur states, "The trouble in my case is that sometimes in moments of acute financial need, I would pry some of the coins out of my box. My conscience gnawed me a bit, but not too severely, because I always intended to put the money back for God before Easter. But somehow or another I was chronically short and never did.

"The fatal morning would always come. With Easter morning's dawn, Aunt Daisy would come over and always go to church with us. After breakfast, we were to bring in our mite box for inspection by our parents. My sister, a saint at an early age, her box was always clean as a whistle and filled with nickels and dimes. It had never been opened. Mine was dog-eared and dirty with smudges on it from illicit openings in the face of financial crisis. I would look inside at a few surviving pennies rattling forlornly.

"My father knew how wicked I had been and he gave me a lecture every Easter. 'Why was I so selfish? Why couldn't I think less of myself and more about others?' He was intent on making me feel my guilt and was successful.

"Finally, Aunt Daisy, tired of it, fished in her purse and drew out a 50-cent piece and looked into my dazzled eyes. 'Here,' she said, 'put this in your mite box.'

"Not fair!' howled my saintly sister.

"It's not right, Daisy,' said my angry father. 'The boy shouldn't be rewarded for poor performance.'

Aunt Daisy just smiled. To my sister she said, 'Well, you're right dear, it's not fair. But never you mind. God will remember how faithful you've been.' To my father she said, 'haven't you ever had a gift that you did not deserve? I should think Easter might remind you of that.'

"Then her warm brown eyes rested on me, the chief of sinners. She said, "Arthur, God loves all sinners, large ones and small ones like you. But don't push him too far."

Aunt Daisy understood something about grace and love. Aunt Daisy understood that we can fall down. She understood that we can let people down. But she also understood we should strive for faithfulness.

Today, we are in the midst of our sermon series called ***Beginning Again: Basics in Faith, Wesleyan Style***. Last week, we talked about the problem of sin. We talked about how sin can have a hold of our lives and allow us to be captivated or separated from God. Last week, Susan reminded us that we can't talk about sin without talking about grace.

Today, I get to talk about grace. But please understand we can't talk about God's grace in the United Methodist tradition, without talking about sin. In our scripture for today, Paul reminds us of a challenge of life. We like to do our own thing. We like to live as if we are the center of the universe. We like to live as if we don't need anyone else.

But he also reminds us that, this way of living leaves us cut off from God, and from other people. This type of thinking gets us in trouble, when we act like we can just go through life alone. Paul understood that our hope is ultimately only in God.

John Wesley, the founder of United Methodism said over two hundred years ago, that God is acting in our life, long before we are even aware of God acting. In fact, he even had a name for this kind of grace. It is called prevenient grace (or preventing grace). It is

that action of God that moves in our lives even before we are aware of God.

He went on from there to say, that when we realized that our lives are broken and in need of something more, he reminds us that is what Justifying grace is all about. It is getting to that place in our life where we realize I don't want to live life all by myself anymore. I can't. I need help. When we turn our lives over to God, Wesley says, God will be there for us to make us whole. That is justifying grace.

For John Wesley, grace is all about being given a chance for life from God.

One of the most moving stories coming out of World War II Germany, occurred on a bus driving through a large German City. A Jewish woman was riding that bus next to a German man, when it was suddenly boarded by Nazi SS troops. They demanded that everyone produce their papers. This woman began to panic. She didn't have papers. She was Jewish.

She had already seen many of her friends carted off to camps. She knew she was in trouble. She thought of her children. She thought of her husband. And she became visibly agitated. The man next to her asked her what was wrong.

She replied that she was Jewish and she didn't have the necessary papers. She knew she was going to be arrested. She knows she would never see her family again.

All the while, the soldiers moved closer and closer.

Just before they arrived at where they were seated the German man began to curse the woman. She was mortified as he got louder and louder, calling her names, saying she was so forgetful. This immediately attracted the attention of the soldiers who came rushing up asking, "What is going on? Why the yelling?"

That was when the German man looked at this Jewish woman he had never met before and said, "This is my wife. She forgot her

papers again. She is always forgetful. I don't know what I am going to do with her."

The soldiers just laughed and said, "Don't worry about it. We will let her pass. Just make sure she brings her papers the next time."

When they left, the woman looked and the man and said, "Thanks. But why?"

He smiled. He looked at her and touched her hand and said, "Because I think Jesus would have done the same thing."

This man knows of the saving action of Jesus in his life. It had touched his life. He had been given a chance for life from God. And he wanted to give that chance to the woman beside him, as he sought to live his faith in the world. Are you willing to live your faith in the world?

You see, God gives us a chance at life in this world. That is what Grace is all about. The real question for us is, are we willing to accept that gift of grace and life from God?

May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen