



Minding the Gap – May 2019

A Faith and Work Publication

Welcome to *Minding the Gap*, a monthly thought about faith in the workplace!

Paradox: When Both are True

In my recent reading, I've come across Parker Palmer who's written the book *On the Brink of Everything*. It's a book about the latter years of living; looking at many of the principles he's found important to him. From the by-line above you've probably guessed one of them is the **principle of paradox**. For Palmer paradox is "*the notion that life's most important realities often take the form of both-and's rather than either-ors.*" He speaks of a number of important values he holds 'dear' which have proven to him to be baffling, confusing, contradictory, mystical, etc.

I, as all of us have experienced this. It happens where we hold in *mind* and *heart* to both believe and behave in a manner we think is right, fair, helpful, good, etc. for others or the environment around us - that is, **to do what would please our Creator**. For whatever reason beliefs/behaviors seem to fail because of some factor or condition beyond us, and over which we have very limited influence or control. At work we act in a serving manner of benefit (love) toward others to solve a sales problem or resolve a deep-seated conflict only to be confused and mystified by what happens..."if it's right and good why didn't it work?". It creates bafflement and seems to be contradictory (paradoxical) as to how I seriously believed God would have me act.

Such experiences lead us to a loss of courage or confidence in the values and principles we hold dear. However, Palmer makes the observation with good discernment "we all live at the intersection of our small worlds and the big one around us." This becomes the setting for paradox because it is true; God is present in both settings. This is so because the principle we're acting on is far more encompassing than we understand. In reality it's not '**either/or**' but '**both/and**' because the character and qualities of our God are unfathomable; inhabiting both our own hearts and the circumstances of the world. We know this is so when we consider the natures of love, forgiveness, grace and how they change the circumstances of sickness, pain and suffering. Palmer clearly states: "If we want to serve others we must attend to both" (our world and the world out there).

The passage in II Cor. 4:7 serves as a great 'explainer' of our condition: "We carry this precious Message (treasure) around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us". The Message or **treasure** is God and all Her/His attributes which are far beyond our understanding in our **ordinary lives** - often creating contradiction (paradox). Yes, we are limited.

And indeed, there is no simple solution in our work lives and beyond. How do we resolve it? I'm of the belief that giving ourselves *space and time to move away, within our daily conditions will bring resolution*. It is called **Sabbath**. Sabbath in this context is not a specific day, but a time in which we gain energy and confidence that God is present and active in the paradoxes of our lives.

Blessings!

- Jim Grubs

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