

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 20, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship:

Grace Greater than Our Sin- Refrain (UMH 365)

Grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that is greater than all our sin!

Centering Words:

United in one spirit, we are called to stand strongly. United in mind we are called to live faithfully. United in one God, we are called to live abundantly. (*Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020*. 204)

Prayer of the Day:

Beckoning Father, through your grace you draw us all to you. Some responded to your grace when we were young and know the joy of living life by your guidance. Some responded to your grace when we were old, and are at peace that our sins are forgiven. Some may not have responded to your grace, questioning the reality of your mercy. We pray that all of our eyes and hearts may be opened to receive your grace so that from this hour on we may all have the hope of being restored into your divine presence. This we pray in the name of your Son, through whom we are restored to you as he taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith: Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 16: 2-15

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

Epistle Reading: Philippians 1: 21-30

Special Music

Gospel Reading: Matthew 20: 1-16

Sermon: God Is Not Fair

Hymn:

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (UMH 121)

1 There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.

2. There is welcome for the sinner,
and more graces for the good!
There is mercy with the Savior;
there is healing in his blood.

3. For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

4. If our love were but more simple,
we should rest upon God's word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Benediction:

Go forth with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Love with the grace of Jesus Christ. Rejoice in the steadfast love of God. Amen (*Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020, 207*)

Response:

God Be with You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

God is not Fair

9/20/2020

Matthew 22:1-16

It's not fair, is it? This parable just isn't fair. Those workers that worked only about one hour got paid the same as all those who worked in the vineyard all day. Those that worked all day should have gotten paid at least 12 times more than those who only worked one hour. I would be indignant if I saw that someone who worked only one hour got paid the same amount as I did after working 12 hours. This is not fair!

Yet, Jesus is saying this is what the kingdom of heaven is like. The rule in God's divine kingdom is like a landowner who pays those who work one hour the same as those who work 12 hours. This seems to mean that God is not fair.

I mean, I have been a good Christian my whole life. I was confirmed and joined the church when I was 8 years old. I rarely missed Sunday School or Church (Mom made sure of that). I served on the church council as a youth. I served on the district and conference youth and young adult councils. I served on just about every committee in the church. I worked with the "least of these" in my career in mental health. Now I am striving to be an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. I have worked for God my whole life. I should get a mansion, something along the lines of the Biltmore Estate.

Those people who sinned their whole lives drinking, committing adultery, committing murder and breaking all ten commandments daily and then make a deathbed confession and "Accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior" as they have one foot in hell, well, maybe they can have a pop-up tent on the outskirts of heaven.

Yes, our reward in heaven should be based upon how much we do for God here on earth. The better we are here the more we get there.

That is if God is fair, according to earthly standards. According to earthly rule, this is the way it should be. But Jesus is saying this is the Kingdom of Heaven, the divine rule of God, not earthly rule. God's rule is different from earthly rule.

Earthly rule is based on justice and fairness. You get what you earn. You are rewarded according to what you do. But God's rule is not based on justice and

fairness. God's rule is based on grace. Our reward of salvation comes from God's grace.

This parable tells us much about God's grace by which we receive our salvation. Notice that it is the landowner that goes out to hire workers. In Jesus' time that would be ridiculous. No self-respecting landowner would go out to hire workers, they would send a servant.

In the kingdom of heaven, it is the landowner, God, that goes out to find workers. God is going out and looking for people to work in the divine kingdom. God is going out to hire us to work in the divine vineyard. It is God, not some angel, but God seeking to bring people into the Kingdom of heaven. God's desire for us to work in the divine vineyard, to come into the kingdom of heaven, is so great that God leaves the divine kingdom and comes down to earth to hire us. The God of grace seeks workers.

Secondly, the landowner keeps going out throughout the day to hire workers. He goes at sunup, the usual time to hire workers. Then he goes back at 9:00, noon, 3:00 and even 5:00, an hour before quitting time, and hires more workers. The landowner does not just go out once to hire workers. He goes out continually throughout the day to hire workers. God is continually seeking workers. God is continually going after us. God is not satisfied with just a few workers in the divine vineyard. God wants everybody working in the divine vineyard. So, God keeps going out to hire workers. The God of grace continually seeks workers until all are working in the divine vineyard.

Notice something about those workers that were hired at 5:00. When asked why they had been standing there idle all day, the workers respond that no one had hired them. They had been standing there all day hoping to get hired, hoping to earn enough to feed themselves and their families, but they had been rejected. They were the rejects. Maybe they did not appear strong enough. Perhaps they were disabled in some way. Perhaps they were just unlucky and simply not picked. But they were in need of work so the landowner hires even the rejects. The God of grace hires the rejects to work in the divine vineyard.

The landowner pays all the workers the same, regardless of how long they worked. Now denarius was the usual day's wage for a laborer at the time of Jesus. It was basically subsistence wage. It would buy enough food for a family for one

day. So, the landowner gave each worker, regardless of how long they worked, what they needed for that day. God gives us what we need regardless of how long we may work for God. We are all in need of salvation. We are all in need of being restored into God's presence. God gives that grace that restores us into the divine presence. The God of grace gives us what we need, salvation, being restored into relationship with God.

The keyword is gives. God gives grace in order that all may be restored to God. The landowner asked those that were grumbling if they were envious because he was generous. The landowner knew that every one of those who worked for him that day needed a denarius to have enough for themselves and their families. The landlord gave generously what every person that worked in the vineyard needed to live. God gives us generously what we need to live in the divine presence, the grace that overcomes our sin. God gives grace so we may be restored to him.

So, as we consider the "fairness" of this parable we see the fault of even considering that there is an issue of fairness in God's vineyard. We must take a step back and look at what led to Jesus telling this parable. A young man comes to Jesus asking what he must do to have eternal life. The young man relates that he has kept all the commandments. The young man implies that since he has kept all the commandments, he has earned eternal life as he asks "what more do I lack?" Jesus tells him to sell all he has and give to the poor. Jesus is telling him that he cannot earn his way into God's kingdom but has to give up all "evidence" of his blessing- wealth, youth, even morality- and follow Jesus.

By following that incident with this parable, Jesus is showing the disciples, and us, that one cannot earn God's grace which restores us to God. Our reward of God's grace that leads to salvation does not come from how long we have worked in the vineyard, all day or one hour, but from God's generosity. Our salvation, our basic need to be in God's presence, is given to us due to God's generosity. God generously gives saving grace to all, those that work all day and those that work an hour. God gives saving grace especially to those that the world rejects. God continually seeks to bring all people to work in the divine vineyard.

We can grumble about God not being fair, or we can rejoice that all are given God's saving grace so that the Kingdom of Heaven may come on earth.