

God's Grace

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Year A: Pentecost 17: Mt 20: 1-16

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“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?’ ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

God as the landowner has extravagant grace. We, humans, think we must earn our way. Those ways are not God's ways. May our Lord help us give our neighbors as much grace as we want from God.

(Slide) A landowner went to hire some day laborers to harvest his fields. He hired some workers early in the day. Again, the landowner hired additional workers at 9 am, extra workers at noon, others at 3pm and added extra workers at 5 pm.

When it came time for them to be paid, the landowner told the manager, ‘Gather them all around and pay them all the same amount.’

The manager did just that, gathering the workers in a circle. To those who entered the vineyard at 5 pm, the manager paid them the amount for one day’s wage. To

those hired at 3 pm, the manager paid them the amount for one day's wage. He did the same for those hired at noon. Everyone was watching as the manager went around the circle. For those hired at 9 am and 6 am, they also got paid one day's wage.

Suddenly the circle erupted in shouts of celebration and joy. Those hired early in the day were giving high-fives and hugging the men hired late in the day. Those hired at 6 am were bumping fists with those hired mid-day.

“We did it! The grapes are in before the sunset!”

“Great job everybody! Way to be a team!”

It was quickly decided that since they all had enough to feed their own families, they each would take a tiny bit of their daily wage and have a small party that night. The meeting place was designated and off they went to start the celebration. As everyone disappeared over the hill, the landowner smiled with satisfaction. “Perhaps they are beginning to understand,” he thought to himself.

(Slide) What does the word ‘grace’ mean to you?

What does the word ‘grace’ mean to you? Does it sound like cotton candy; fluffy but without real substance or nutrients? Does it sound like the very ground we walk on, without God's grace we have nothing? Or maybe you're somewhere in between. It sure sounds good, but you're still living into what grace means in your life.

For we Lutheran Christians, grace is one of the foundational walls of our theological house. Martin Luther said, “Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his (her) life on it a thousand times.” (Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings)

So what is Grace? (Slide) Grace: God's unconditional love and mercy towards us. None of us deserve God's grace. We are sinners and do not deserve God's love, God's forgiveness. Yet, we are given it as pure gift. It is an unconditional gift. Grace.

God – who is the landowner in the parable – says, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” You and me, we don't produce grace. God produces that grace that is freely given to you and me and to everyone. Remember, Amazing Grace?

(slide 6) Who deserves God's grace? Ahh, here's the question. Notice the word 'deserve'. The workers who went into the fields early in the day thought they deserved more money because they worked longer. They sweated in the heat, and they picked more grapes than the others. Therefore, they deserved more money.

If we hear ourselves saying, 'But I did...' and 'That's not fair!' it's the old Adam in all of us rising up to put ourselves over our neighbors. If you've ever spent much time around young children, it won't be long until you hear this theme.

"She got more macaroni than I did!"

"How come you chose him? It was going to be my turn!"

"It's not fair!" Right! Life isn't fair. Some people have more than we have and we don't like it. We want what they have.

That's why we have a living example of this text in the United Auto Workers strike happening right now. They want additional pay and benefits for their hard work. They want the execs and the companies who are benefiting from tremendous profits to share some of those earnings with the people who are actually doing the work of assembling cars. Why should those who don't do all the hard labor (i.e. the men hired at 5 pm), get a living wage and much more so than the workers who go to work in the auto plants early each morning? I'm not saying the workers should not be striking or that they do not deserve more money. I'm lifting up the human desire for what someone else has.

(slide 7) Who does not deserve God's grace?

Take a moment and answer this question. If we look around the inside of our minds, all of us can come up with a few names of people who we believe do not deserve God's grace.

Here's the rub. The workers in the vineyard who worked all day long believe the ones who came on the clock late in the day, don't deserve God's grace. According to Jesus' telling of the parable, there was no party at the end of the day. There were only grumblings, hurt feelings and anger.

Rev. Karl Jacobson says, "*The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is about our frustration with the grace of God as it applies not to us, but to others.*"

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-25/commentary-on-matthew-201-16-3>)

The angered workers not only wanted more for themselves. But they were also upset the workers hired last got the same as they did. The main point of contention being those last workers didn't deserve that money.

Let's face it. We like to play God. We like to decide who should get what. And when our neighbor gets the same as we have but we decide they don't deserve it, then we're playing God and we're gambling with grace.

The homeless situation in Loveland continues to be a challenge, the latest being whether to turn Monroe school into housing for homeless youth. Those who live in houses make decisions about those who don't live in houses. There is an inherent power differential that cannot be eliminated. But some who live in houses advocate for the homeless to be housed. Others who have a roof over their own head, say that not everyone deserves a roof over their head. Their argument is that everyone *should not* have the same...a roof over their head.

God says, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" The rub of the parable is that sometimes deep inside our spirits, we believe not everyone should be a recipient of God's grace.

(slide 8) We do not earn God's grace. Period.

Yet we live in this fallen world, where everything else in our lives is about our ability to earn it, pay for it, keep it and own it. We live in systems of merit. If you perform your job well, you can have a pay raise. If you get more education, you can have more letters added to your name. If you do this, then this.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace! Faith is not a daring confidence in our own efforts and power. We trust in God alone – first Commandment. Trust in God alone.

NT Wright says, 'God doesn't make contracts with us, as if we could bargain or negotiate for a better deal. He makes covenants, in which he promises us everything and asks of us everything in return. When he (God) keeps his promises, he (God) is not rewarding us for effort, but doing what comes naturally to his overflowingly generous nature.' (Matthew for Everyone; Part 2. N.T. Wright. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky. 2004. Pg 57.)

God is a covenant maker. Throughout the scriptures God says, “This is who I am. This is my character. Here is how I’m going to be in relationship with you. Will you join me?”

And even when we refuse to join God...when we grumble, get angry, run the other way, raise our fists and say, “But you promised!” Even then, God says, “Are you going to sit on the sidelines, or will you come? Come, join my other children in the field... in the field of life. There are grapes to be picked. People to be fed. Parties to be held. Grace to rejoice in.” Amen.

When everyone had their coins in hand