

September 24, 2023
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 20:1-16

THE GENEROUS MASTER

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“It’s just not fair!” How many times have you *heard* those words? How many times have you *said* those words? You don’t have to teach people to notice when things are *not fair*. It comes naturally. One child notices when their snack is smaller than the other’s. You notice it when your co-worker gets paid more than you do for performing the same job. You notice it when you are struggling financially and suffering physically while your unbelieving neighbor seems to be living a charmed and blessed life. All of us are born with an acute sense of *fairness*. Especially when we’re on the short side of the scale, we notice when things are *not equal*.

The truth is, life *is not fair*. While living on this side of heaven, in the kingdom of the world, living under the rule and reign of sinful people – life is *not fair*, especially for Christians. And that makes you want to accuse God of being *unfair* to you. But the kingdom of heaven, that is, the rule and reign of God in Christ Jesus is *not about what is fair*. Because if God were *fair*, if He gave each of us exactly what we deserve, none of us would last a moment. In His righteous judgment He would wipe you and me and all mankind off the face of the earth without a moment’s hesitation. If He were *completely fair*, you would all spend eternity in hell paying for your sin, which is exactly what you deserve.

The wonderful news is – God is *not fair*. He is much *greater than fair*! He is gracious, merciful, and forgiving. He’s also holy, just, and righteous. In the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, Jesus illustrates God’s generosity and divine grace in the kingdom of heaven... in His rule and reign in Christ Jesus. Human generosity freely and liberally gives things that perishable. But God’s generosity freely and liberally gives imperishable divine grace and mercy which by its very nature is given without regard to any merit or worthiness in the one who receives it. His divine grace is His compassionate love toward sinners, pouring out all His riches upon you at the expense of His Son, Christ Jesus.

Our Gospel parable this morning is a continuation of Jesus’ teaching of how difficult it is to get into the kingdom of heaven. By human reason and wisdom, entrance into kingdom is not fair. A rich young man went away from Jesus in sadness after hearing how difficult it is. (cf: Matthew 19:16–22) His confidence was in his ability to keep God’s commandments, yet his conscience told him he still lacked something. There must be something else he *must do* in order to have eternal life. So, Jesus gave him something to do. He told him to sell all his possessions and give it to the poor. *Then* he would have treasure in heaven. But the young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

As the rich young man goes away, Jesus says to His disciples that it is difficult for a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. (cf: Matthew 19:23–30) It's so difficult that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. This leaves the disciples shocked and scratching their heads? It doesn't sound *fair*. Who then can be saved?

So Jesus teaches them and us a parable to illustrate that in the kingdom of heaven, that is, in the rule and reign of God in Christ Jesus, heavenly inheritance is not given as earthly inheritances commonly are. In the rule and reign of God in Christ Jesus, God is the Master and He *can* and *will* give according to His own merciful pleasure. What counts is the Master's generosity. What counts is God's generosity. Jesus says:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” (Matthew 20:1)

Early in the morning the master went out to hire laborers. Laborers who're looking for work at the crack of dawn are usually hard workers. They negotiate and agree to work a twelve-hour shift and for a full day's wage – one denarius. It's a big job, so seeing others standing idle in the marketplace a few hours later, the master tells them to go into the vineyard and he would pay them whatever was right. Later, again and later again, he sends more laborers into the vineyard. And finally one last time, about an hour before quitting time, the master finds others standing idly in the marketplace... others who no one else would hire... and he sends them into the vineyard with no promise to be paid anything.

The focus of the parable is one the *first ones* and the *last ones*. They are polar opposites. The *first ones* have an agreement: one denarius for one day's labor. But the *last ones* are promised nothing. The *first ones* have work their tails off in the scorching sun all day long. The *last ones* who stood around idle for most of the day, work less than one hour. At the end of the day the owner of the vineyard says to his foreman:

“Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.” (Matthew 20:8)

He pays them in reverse order from when they were hired. Put yourself in the shoes of the *first ones*. Imagine – you're watching the paymaster give the *last ones* get paid a full day's wage. What do you think? You're probably thinking: *“Wow! How generous the master is! He's giving a whole day's wage to the ones who only worked for one hour. If he's that charitable to the last ones, how much more is he going to give me, one of the first?”*

This is human wisdom, right? You'd do the math. You worked twelve hours. You'd expect at least twelve times as much as those who worked only one hour. But then it happens. You're paid exactly what you agreed to in the morning. Everyone is treated the same by the master. Everyone receives equal pay regardless of the hours labored. And you're left standing there in bitter jealousy and anger, resenting the master, and despising the *last ones*. What would you say? You'd say: *“That's not fair! We worked our tails off in the hot sun all day long and you made these guys that worked less than an hour, these guys that no one else would hire, you made them equal to us.”*

That's when the master replies:

"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" ¹⁶ ***So the last will be first, and the first last.***" (Matthew 20:15–16)

No. It doesn't seem fair. It doesn't appear as generosity as we understand it, but God's ways are not our ways. Don't forget – the ***first ones*** were not short changed. They were paid exactly as agreed upon.

Here is the lesson of the parable. God does what He wants with what is His. Who are you and I to begrudge His generosity? The wonderful news is – God is ***not fair***. He is much ***greater than fair!*** He is gracious, merciful, and forgiving. He's also holy, just, and righteous. He doesn't give you what you deserve, and you are blessed because He doesn't. Listen to what Holy Scriptures says you deserve:

- St James says: ***"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."*** (James 2:10)
- St Paul says: ***"... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** (Romans 3:23)
- Paul says: ***"For the wages of sin is death..."*** (Romans 6:23)

God doesn't give you what you deserve – but – to all who are in Christ Jesus, He gives what is undeserved. In His righteous generosity, He freely and liberally gives imperishable divine grace... grace given without regard to any merit or worthiness in you. His divine grace is His compassionate love toward sinners such as you and me, pouring out all His riches upon you at the expense of His Son, Christ Jesus' innocent suffering and death on the cross. And what exactly are these riches? Listen to those three Bible verses I just read, except this time, I'll read the entire verse.

- St James says: ***"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."*** (James 2:10) [But God's] ***Mercy triumphs over judgment.***" (James 2:13)
- St Paul says: ***"... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."*** (Romans 3:23–25)
- Paul says: ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 6:23)

By human reason, everyone knows that the ***last ones*** didn't deserve to be paid the same as the ***first ones*** – but deserves have nothing to do with it. Because if everyone got what they deserved, Jesus would've never gone to the cross. He didn't deserve to be beaten half to death, nailed on a cross, and die a sinner's death. Indeed, deserves have nothing to do with it. In God's generosity He handed His sinless Son, the First One whom He loved before the foundation of the world, over into death, so that He could become the least and last hanging on the cross, so that you might become first in Him.

God makes no distinction. It doesn't matter if you were baptized when you were three days old or three days ago. God's generous grace overflows. It doesn't matter if you left everything behind years ago to follow Jesus like the original disciples, or if the Holy Spirit called you to faith by the Gospel last night. God's generous grace overflows. He treats His children equally. All believers receive the same wage, regardless of length of service or what they may have accomplished. Who are you and I to begrudge His generosity?

The wages paid out only appear unfair if you take your eyes off of the Master. Everything you have and everything that you are – are an undeserved gracious gift from God. Jesus purchased you with His precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He reconciled you with the Father, and freed you from sin, death, and the devil. You are a sinner saved by grace alone, through faith alone, on the basis of Scripture alone.

It's God's prerogative. He does what He wants with what is His. And you are His. He called you to faith by the Gospel and gave you His Name in Baptism. He personally feeds you by His Word and in His body and blood, given and shed for you in His holy Supper. He promises to never leave you nor forsake you. It's not fair! You don't merit it. You don't deserve it – but deserves have nothing to do with it. It's a gracious gift from God for all who believe. At the end of the day, what counts is God's generosity in Jesus.

On the Last Day, Christ will return and the Kingdom of God will come in all its fullness. All who have been called as workers in the vineyard... all believers in Christ Jesus will receive from the Master what he deems just.

“So the last will be first, and the first last.” (Matthew 20:16)

God's generosity is always more than you deserve. His ways are not our ways. You have His promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation, all for the sake of Christ crucified for you.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.

September 24, 2023
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 20:1-16

THE GENEROUS MASTER

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“It’s just not fair!” How many times have you *heard* those words? How many times have you *said* those words? You don’t have to teach people to notice when things are *not fair*. It comes naturally. One child notices when their snack is smaller than the other’s. You notice it when your co-worker gets paid more than you do for performing the same job. You notice it when you are struggling financially and suffering physically while your unbelieving neighbor seems to be living a charmed and blessed life. All of us are born with an acute sense of *fairness*. Especially when we’re on the short side of the scale, we notice when things are *not equal*.

The truth is, life *is not fair*. While living on this side of heaven, in the kingdom of the world, living under the rule and reign of sinful people – life is *not fair*, especially for Christians. And that makes you want to accuse God of being *unfair* to you. But the kingdom of heaven, that is, the rule and reign of God in Christ Jesus is *not about what is fair*. Because if God were *fair*, if He gave each of us exactly what we deserve, none of us would last a moment. In His righteous judgment He would wipe you and me and all mankind off the face of the earth without a moment’s hesitation. If He were *completely fair*, you would all spend eternity in hell paying for your sin, which is exactly what you deserve.

The wonderful news is – God is *not fair*. He is much *greater than fair*! He is gracious, merciful, and forgiving. He’s also holy, just, and righteous. In the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, Jesus illustrates God’s generosity and divine grace in the kingdom of heaven... in His rule and reign in Christ Jesus. Human generosity freely and liberally gives things that perishable. But God’s generosity freely and liberally gives imperishable divine grace and mercy which by its very nature is given without regard to any merit or worthiness in the one who receives it. His divine grace is His compassionate love toward sinners, pouring out all His riches upon you at the expense of His Son, Christ Jesus.

Our Gospel parable this morning is a continuation of Jesus’ teaching of how difficult it is to get into the kingdom of heaven. By human reason and wisdom, entrance into kingdom is not fair. A rich young man went away from Jesus in sadness after hearing how difficult it is. (cf: Matthew 19:16–22) His confidence was in his ability to keep God’s commandments, yet his conscience told him he still lacked something. There must be something else he *must do* in order to have eternal life. So, Jesus gave him something to do. He told him to sell all his possessions and give it to the poor. **Then** he would have treasure in heaven. But the young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

As the rich young man goes away, Jesus says to His disciples that it is difficult for a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. (cf: Matthew 19:23–30) It's so difficult that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. This leaves the disciples shocked and scratching their heads? It doesn't sound *fair*. Who then can be saved?

So Jesus teaches them and us a parable to illustrate that in the kingdom of heaven, that is, in the rule and reign of God in Christ Jesus, heavenly inheritance is not given as earthly inheritances commonly are. In the rule and reign of God in Christ Jesus, God is the Master and He *can* and *will* give according to His own merciful pleasure. What counts is the Master's generosity. What counts is God's generosity. Jesus says:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” (Matthew 20:1)

Early in the morning the master went out to hire laborers. Laborers who're looking for work at the crack of dawn are usually hard workers. They negotiate and agree to work a twelve-hour shift and for a full day's wage – one denarius. It's a big job, so seeing others standing idle in the marketplace a few hours later, the master tells them to go into the vineyard and he would pay them whatever was right. Later, again and later again, he sends more laborers into the vineyard. And finally one last time, about an hour before quitting time, the master finds others standing idly in the marketplace... others who no one else would hire... and he sends them into the vineyard with no promise to be paid anything.

The focus of the parable is one the *first ones* and the *last ones*. They are polar opposites. The *first ones* have an agreement: one denarius for one day's labor. But the *last ones* are promised nothing. The *first ones* have work their tails off in the scorching sun all day long. The *last ones* who stood around idle for most of the day, work less than one hour. At the end of the day the owner of the vineyard says to his foreman:

“Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.” (Matthew 20:8)

He pays them in reverse order from when they were hired. Put yourself in the shoes of the *first ones*. Imagine – you're watching the paymaster give the *last ones* get paid a full day's wage. What do you think? You're probably thinking: *“Wow! How generous the master is! He's giving a whole day's wage to the ones who only worked for one hour. If he's that charitable to the last ones, how much more is he going to give me, one of the first?”*

This is human wisdom, right? You'd do the math. You worked twelve hours. You'd expect at least twelve times as much as those who worked only one hour. But then it happens. You're paid exactly what you agreed to in the morning. Everyone is treated the same by the master. Everyone receives equal pay regardless of the hours labored. And you're left standing there in bitter jealousy and anger, resenting the master, and despising the *last ones*. What would you say? You'd say: *“That's not fair! We worked our tails off in the hot sun all day long and you made these guys that worked less than an hour, these guys that no one else would hire, you made them equal to us.”*

That's when the master replies:

"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" ¹⁶ ***So the last will be first, and the first last.***" (Matthew 20:15–16)

No. It doesn't seem fair. It doesn't appear as generosity as we understand it, but God's ways are not our ways. Don't forget – the ***first ones*** were not short changed. They were paid exactly as agreed upon.

Here is the lesson of the parable. God does what He wants with what is His. Who are you and I to begrudge His generosity? The wonderful news is – God is ***not fair***. He is much ***greater than fair!*** He is gracious, merciful, and forgiving. He's also holy, just, and righteous. He doesn't give you what you deserve, and you are blessed because He doesn't. Listen to what Holy Scriptures says you deserve:

- St James says: ***"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."*** (James 2:10)
- St Paul says: ***"... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** (Romans 3:23)
- Paul says: ***"For the wages of sin is death..."*** (Romans 6:23)

God doesn't give you what you deserve – but – to all who are in Christ Jesus, He gives what is undeserved. In His righteous generosity, He freely and liberally gives imperishable divine grace... grace given without regard to any merit or worthiness in you. His divine grace is His compassionate love toward sinners such as you and me, pouring out all His riches upon you at the expense of His Son, Christ Jesus' innocent suffering and death on the cross. And what exactly are these riches? Listen to those three Bible verses I just read, except this time, I'll read the entire verse.

- St James says: ***"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."*** (James 2:10) [But God's] ***Mercy triumphs over judgment.***" (James 2:13)
- St Paul says: ***"... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."*** (Romans 3:23–25)
- Paul says: ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 6:23)

By human reason, everyone knows that the ***last ones*** didn't deserve to be paid the same as the ***first ones*** – but deserves have nothing to do with it. Because if everyone got what they deserved, Jesus would've never gone to the cross. He didn't deserve to be beaten half to death, nailed on a cross, and die a sinner's death. Indeed, deserves have nothing to do with it. In God's generosity He handed His sinless Son, the First One whom He loved before the foundation of the world, over into death, so that He could become the least and last hanging on the cross, so that you might become first in Him.

God makes no distinction. It doesn't matter if you were baptized when you were three days old or three days ago. God's generous grace overflows. It doesn't matter if you left everything behind years ago to follow Jesus like the original disciples, or if the Holy Spirit called you to faith by the Gospel last night. God's generous grace overflows. He treats His children equally. All believers receive the same wage, regardless of length of service or what they may have accomplished. Who are you and I to begrudge His generosity?

The wages paid out only appear unfair if you take your eyes off of the Master. Everything you have and everything that you are – are an undeserved gracious gift from God. Jesus purchased you with His precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He reconciled you with the Father, and freed you from sin, death, and the devil. You are a sinner saved by grace alone, through faith alone, on the basis of Scripture alone.

It's God's prerogative. He does what He wants with what is His. And you are His. He called you to faith by the Gospel and gave you His Name in Baptism. He personally feeds you by His Word and in His body and blood, given and shed for you in His holy Supper. He promises to never leave you nor forsake you. It's not fair! You don't merit it. You don't deserve it – but deserves have nothing to do with it. It's a gracious gift from God for all who believe. At the end of the day, what counts is God's generosity in Jesus.

On the Last Day, Christ will return and the Kingdom of God will come in all its fullness. All who have been called as workers in the vineyard... all believers in Christ Jesus will receive from the Master what he deems just.

“So the last will be first, and the first last.” (Matthew 20:16)

God's generosity is always more than you deserve. His ways are not our ways. You have His promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation, all for the sake of Christ crucified for you.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.