**Sermon Matthew 20:1-16**

***May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.***

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**I had a hard time with expressing the message this week. No matter how many times I went back to explaining this parable, I kept going back to the concept: Is God Fair? But that was not the message.**

**I’ve been asked the question a few times by different people – “how can this be right? How can this situation be fair? How could God allow this?” And the answers seem shallow as they are said to eyes that are full of tears.**

**Looking at this passage, if I try to reduce it to a lesson on morality, if I try to garnish from it ethics, or if I look for a code of justice, I fail. It goes so far beyond these things, that it seems to contradict them. I have to accept that fairness is a human concept and does not apply to God. Whatever He does, is right. This is the best answer. It is the only answer.**

**God is not fair, He is right, He is generous.**

**This parable isn’t about the question of fairness, it’s about the outrageous generosity and love of God, as He invites all people to share in His kingdom – together. Parables exist for one teachable moment, for one reason. They do not exist to offer social commentary. In this parable, that one moment is seen in the amazing question Jesus asks…. “Friend… do you begrudge my generosity?”**

**Do We begrudge Jesus His Generosity? Does it make sense, that someone would begrudge God the opportunity to show someone else His love? Could we find ourselves jealous, because God’s love is poured out on someone we don’t feel is worthy of such love? Before we get start thinking that we would never deny God that opportunity, let’s look at scripture which is loaded with such examples.**

**We remember the story of the prodigal son who was a squanderer and carouser, whose brother was irate, because his father wanted to celebrate the return of the long sinful brother. He resented his father’s love, shown to his own brother! God’s people would never be like that – right? Who would ever act like that? Who would resent God’s love? Well listen to these words from the Old Testament,**

**“Jonah yelled at God, "God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready in a moment to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness! "So, God, if you won't kill them, kill me! I'm better off dead!" God said, "What do you have to be angry about?" But Jonah just left. He went out of the city to the east and sat down in a sulk. He put together a makeshift shelter of leafy branches and sat there in the shade to see what would happen to the city.”**

**Talk about someone not just upset – but bitterly angry about God’s grace…It is good that we would never get that way…**

**What about when we have trouble welcoming someone into “our” group? Maybe they did something to us in the past, and we are unwilling to forgive – do we begrudge God sharing with them the same love that He pours out on us? Maybe they are a bit different than us, does that mean we walk away from them, and not share the same concern for them, that we do for those near to us? Or maybe, even recognizing the differences, becomes so awkward, we walk away - rather than rejoice that God will give us the love, the grace, and the strength to do His work, to show them His love, and His mercy.**

**In this vineyard, the work is not pulling out weeds, nor harvesting grapes to make good wine, the work is ministering to each other, assuring each other of God’s love, His grace, and His forgiveness. No matter who they are. No matter how awkward it is to love them, no matter the cost to us….for our cost is nothing compared to the cost of the cross.**

**Or will be begrudge Jesus His generosity? Will we resent that God has marked them as our brothers and sisters, and indeed our friends.**

**Rescued from Idleness.**

**In today’s Gospel, at the beginning of the conversation, the master uses a unique word to address the dissatisfied workers. It is translated as friend, but was a word that ranged from partner to brother-kinsman. It is not the word you would use for a common day laborer, but implies a stake in the work.**

**And that is what this parable of the Kingdom of God is about. We see it clearly in the later trips of the master, as he talks to those hanging around – they are tired and disappointed, because they have not yet been hired. You see it in the last group – they say – no one has given us a reason NOT to be here.**

**Jesus says – there is a reason – here is a part in my kingdom! You want a reason to be active – you want meaning in your life? Come into my kingdom – you are welcome to be a part of it – and more -- a partner. This parable isn’t about workplace fairness, it is about the kingdom of God, and who is invited into it. It’s not about so called fairness, for God simply offers a part in the kingdom to all who would accept His offer.**

**No one here is perfect – no one here functions perfectly – no one here has been exempt from feeling broken, and sad. Though perhaps we think we are alone in those feelings, if we actually get to know each other – we are not. And every person belongs here. Even the ones from our past, even those we have trouble understanding in the present.**

**We might even need some supernatural help from the Master to accept them. We have that, for He has deemed them acceptable. He did so, in the very way He deemed you acceptable – by dying on the cross. And so we find them kneeling with us, at this same altar, for the same reason – they need the Bread of Life, they need the Blood of the covenant – that covers their sins…and ours. It does not matter if they accepted Jesus today, or years ago, their reward is the same.**

**We need to minister to each other – we need to serve each other, to love each other. We need to continue to serve each other, constantly reminded that the Lord called us together as His people, as His friends. And we have a mission to bring others to his altar to share God’s love.**

**It is not a command in the sense of Law, to love one another. It’s not about justifying our own actions, or our place or that of others. It is of the deepest grace that God places us together, God is about righteousness. His righteousness, promised to us – given to us, even though we don’t deserve it.**

**As we enjoy His peace, His incomprehensible peace, let us share it with all of those who need it. We can do this, because our hearts and minds are kept safe in that peace, by Jesus Christ Himself.**

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***Remember the words of our Lord, “It is better to give than to receive”.***