



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Devotion Time: Week : Matthew chapters 19 and 20
Prayer Time

God of holy community, you welcome us in to this space at our own timing. And you reward the last the same as the first, with the full forgiveness of Jesus. Help us to not only welcome those after us into this same full forgiveness, but help us to experience the joy of your Kingdom always growing with more until none are first or last, but all are truly at home with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Fairness in Jesus' kingdom is a bit jarring. First, Jesus is always sitting with sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. These ancient labels still carry certain connotations in our own day, and we get jealous that Jesus would rather be outside of our church eating with them and not in our church basement dining on our fine potluck of casseroles, salads, and liturgically correct colored Jell-O.

Then, Jesus is saying things like this - the last will be first, and the first will be last. And we see the one who just walked in, questioning faith, never served a committee, didn't get elected to church council, didn't contribute to the latest building project or buy a hymnal or get a name engraved behind the sacred element used in worship. And they have full standing with us when it comes time to decide church policy or budget or who gets elected next?

It's not fair. And if we want anything -- we want it fair and square. We want it earned, deserved, and according to standard. I worked x - hours for set pay, I get set pay times those hours. I worked for benefits, I get set benefits. You don't work, why should you get a hand out for a car payment or rent or health. That is fair.

And Jesus tosses this in our face and welcomes the last ahead of us. And it stings.

But maybe we need to be reminded, we aren't exactly first, either. Maybe we need to be reminded there are others who are putting in more work than we are in this Kingdom. Maybe we need to stop and see beyond our own little neighborhood and see the Kingdom workers who are outside of church buildings eating with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes. Maybe we need to see that there are others who are giving more than we are, as their hearts of generosity are beyond our understanding. Yes. See we are not so much the first as we think we are. And this parable is one that should actually give us a chance to pause and thank God for receiving us, for welcoming us, for not counting status or considering who showed up first, volunteered the most, gave the most, when pronouncing forgiveness and welcome.

Jesus isn't fair, not by our standards of fair. But our standards of fair are not Jesus' standards of fair ... and we need to adjust our standards to meet his.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

Fairness

I sent my kids to the amusement park at 9 AM, and they paid full price to get in. They had all day to enjoy the rides, the roller coasters, the log flume, and to eat all the carnival food their wallet could support.

I arrived to pick them up at 2 hours before the park closed, and the gate attendant asked me to pay full price to get in. But, I'm just here for the last 2 hours, and I won't get to go on all the rides, I said. To no avail. I paid full price, and didn't get to ride nearly the same as my kids did who was there all day.

Fair or not fair? I know this is a reversal of Jesus' parable. Because instead of getting paid for less time, I am the one paying the same amount for less time. But it is our modern equivalent. We see time and money as having some intrinsic connection - more time equals more money - less time equals less money.

So what is fair? Should I have paid full price?