

Matthew 20:1-16

Our Generous and Giving God

Someone once said grace is offensive! I see someone receiving grace I say, "What did you do to deserve it?" I receive grace I say, "Look at me I deserve it."

Today's parable we just heard is about the generosity of God's grace. It is not about work. It has nothing to do with my work to please God. Because my works to please God always come up short. Way short. This parable is rather offensive to some of us hard working, good church people individuals. But to those workers who toiled for only one hour in the vineyard and received the full day's wage, I bet they did not complain. I am certain they rejoiced. I am sure they did not even stick around to compare what the others were paid.

The workers who were hired very early that same morning, they saw things a bit differently. They were in line and heard what the one hour workers received, the 3 hour workers and the 6 hour workers got. Naturally they were disappointed when they received their pay check. I would have been! It was the same as everyone else. They felt they deserved more because they had worked longer and possibly harder than anyone else. They certainly did not have a grace perspective when it came to life. It was not so much what got paid that upset them, it was the generosity of the vineyard owner that got them upset. It was his graciousness that offended them.

Nothing has changed after all these years. Athletes sign their 10 year 25 million dollar contract are happy and overjoyed. But next year they are unhappy. Why? Because someone else is getting more. I want to renegotiate my contract. Children thrilled with a Christmas present they received in the morning are ticked off by the afternoon. Why? Because their friend down the street got more and better. We are happy with what we have one day and the next day dissatisfied because our neighbor has more and better. What did they do to deserve this. I am just as good as them. Our happiness and satisfaction can turn to jealousy and grumbling on a dime. Disappointment does not creep in because of what we received, but it just doesn't seem fair.

Most of us gathered here this morning have been blessed abundantly. Like the first workers in the parable, if we did not know what the others received we would have gone home happy and thankful for what had been given to us. We would have been content. The master paid the workers in the order he did had a purpose. To teach us a lesson about ourselves and about God's grace and generosity.

What can we learn about ourselves? Well it isn't pretty. A parable if it is doing its work draws out the sin in our lives. Yes, even the sins we try to hide and keep from view. It draws out our disappointments and envy and jealousy of others. How we end up in a competition with our neighbors. This happens even though deep down we know we should fear, love and trust in God above all things. As so often happens, it is the worldly things that we love more than the giver of the worldly things. Sin turns the good gifts of God into something that is not so good.

It is not pretty is it? So here we are today as this family of God. It is good let go if this sin and hand it over to God and ask God to forgive, and not only forgive, but to change us. That we may be truly happy even if others receive more and better. That we may truly love God and be truly thankful for all the gifts he showers upon us. If you really think about it we have received much, even though we did not deserve it at all.

That is the key here. Not to base our relationship with God as something we work for or to try to get God to notice me and bless me more. No. But know that everything we have is a gift from God. It is by His grace. It is freely given. His salvation is freely given. It is all by grace. I like what Martin Luther wrote in His explanation of the Lord's Prayer. " We daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment." But this is not what God gives. If God were fair it would be punishment that we get. If God were fair, we would get the wages of our work. And that is not pretty either. But God is not that way. He is a gracious master. He is loving and generous. And He loves giving. He gives us what we need for body and soul and life. And even more. He gives us others to enjoy life. He gives family, friends, and the church family for good Christian fellowship. He give us angels to watch over us and protect us.

And most of all He gives us his Son. Jesus came and He bore the heat of the day and all the burdens of the day for you and for me. That day was Good Friday when he bore all our sins, taking them upon himself, defeating the devil and death. He won our forgiveness and brings each of us back to God. We have a hope because our giving and generous God raised Him from the dead on the third day.

If you think about it, we end up being the last hired to work. Working so little yet given so much. That is because Jesus came last for us so that we can receive the wages of His work, forgiveness, life in His name, and the certain hope and promise of eternal life in heaven.

In Jesus Name.