Pentecost 17 9/20/2026
Matthew 20:1-16 20A

“AM I NOT ALLOWED TO DO WHAT I CHOOSE WITH WHAT BELONGS TO ME? OR DO YOU BEGRUDGE MY GENEROSITY?

In his book on stewardship, Mark Allen Powell tells a story of the conversion of the warlike Gauls in northern Europe in ancient times. When Christian missionaries converted them, Gallic warriors exhibited a strange behavior during their baptisms. When they were baptized, the warriors would hold one arm high in the air. Later, the missionaries learned what they were doing. When the next battle came, the warlike Gual proclaimed, “This arm is not baptized!” and proceeded to use it to destroy his enemy in a most un-Christian manner. Powell shares this story, not to disparage any Gauls or their descendants, but to make a comparison to Americans. He suggests that when American Christians are baptized, they hold out their wallets high in the air, free from the influence of their baptism. “God can have the rest of me,” the thinking goes, “but my money is mine.”

We Americans have a deep and personal attachment to their money. We love our money.

That’s why, My Friends, I would contend that the Parable before us this morning is so very difficult for us to understand. We love the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector; but this parable, we are not real comfortable with it.

My Friends, does God treat us with fairness or grace? The Parable of the workers in the vineyard answers that question for us. This morning, we learn the truth of our Old Testament lesson, God’s ways are not our ways. “Grace isn’t Fair!” – and aren’t you glad? “Fairness” deals with “rewards and punishments,” keeping score. If God dealt with us in

"fairness" we would have no hope, no forgiveness, no salvation. "Fair" means we get what we deserve; "Grace" means we get what we don't deserve. As the Bible says, *By grace that we are saved through faith (Ep 2:8).*

Our parable this morning gives us a lot of heartburn because we completely understand the workers' frustration. It is not fair. These guys worked 12 hours through the heat of the day…those guys worked one hour in the cooler evening…and got paid the same. It's not fair. When you are working it is easy to be content with your pay until you find out the guy next to you, doing the same thing, is making a dollar more an hour more than you are. You were content, now you are upset. You were happy, now you are jealous.

Of course, when I say it's not fair, it's not fair to the way we think God should operate, do things, which is of course my way. God says, "*Be holy – ie, without sin -- for I am holy" (Lev 11:44).* We don't like to compare ourselves to God; He is without sin, right? But, we love to compare ourselves to our neighbors, esp when it comes to our money and the stuff money can buy. I show my age a little when I say in my day, it was all about the brand of blue jeans you wore. Today, it's all about the shoes. Our clothes have to be of the latest, trendiest designer label. We look at our neighbor's bigger, newer house and toys, and say, "If only I had that"! More often than not, the attitude of the sinful heart is, "If I have more money, I'm a better person than my neighbor".

You know, My Friends, why it is easy for us to compare ourselves to our neighbors? It shows how lightly we take sin. Or I suppose I should clarify that: It shows how lightly we take <u>our</u> sin.

I think that's why we don't like this parable very much. It forces us to take a look at ourselves, a look in the mirror of God's Law. And we see our sin. We are at "bad" as those we point the condemning finger at. And we see that we really don't deserve more than our neighbor.

God is not fair. And that is amazing, wondrous, Good News for us. God is not fair. God is not going to give you what you deserve. God is not going to give you what you earn. *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*, the Bible says (Ro 6:23).

At the beginning of our worship service, you confessed that you are by nature sinful and unclean. You have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed, by what you have done and by what you have left undone. You have not loved God with your whole heart; you have not loved your neighbors as yourself. And then you said that you justly deserve God's present and eternal punishment.

You deserve God's punishment. You deserve to be punished now, and you deserve to go to hell for eternity. You said that is what you deserve. The Good News of the Chrisitan faith is that are <u>not</u> going to get what you deserve; because God is not fair. God does not treat us as our sins deserve. He treats us with Grace.

God so loved you that He sent His only-begotten Son in the flesh and, in that human flesh, the Father punished His Son, Jesus, instead of you. The Bible says it this way: *For our sake He – the Father -- made Him – His Son Jesus -- to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Co 5:21).* Jesus suffered and died because of your sin.

God is not fair. Praise God for that. This is incredible *mercy* of God. You don't get what you *do* deserve. The genuine *grace* of God is that you *get* what you *don't* deserve. You get forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Jesus got what you deserve, and you get what Jesus deserves. In Christ, *you* are the righteousness of God. *You* are a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. *You* are a child of God destined to inherit eternal life in the Heavenly City of New Jerusalem. You are on the narrow way to leads to that dear land of rest.

And that roaring lion Satan wants to derail you. The devil wants you off the narrow way and onto the wide, easy way that leads to eternal death. The devil wants you to take your eyes off of Jesus and instead compare yourself to others. The devil wants you to forget about the prize. Forget about the crown of righteousness. Forget about eternity with Jesus. Forget about all that and instead worry about other people – especially what they think of you. The devil wants you to keep score, even in church, about who does more and who does less. The devil wants you to feel prideful superiority over that other guy. The devil does all of this to get you off the narrow way to life because he wants to destroy you. The devil will try to convince you that you are not good enough. You have not done enough. You deserve death and hell. It is only fair.

But you, Dear Child of God, have the incredible mercy of God. You don't get what you *do* deserve. The genuine *grace* of God is that you *get* what you *don't* deserve.

And God does His work in you through the means of grace, so that you keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't compare yourself to others. It is not about what you or the others are doing. God's mercy and grace is all you need. Forgetting what lies behind strain forward to what lies ahead. Press

on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Set your mind on the things of God rather than on the things of man. Never forget, salvation unto us has come, by God's free grace and favor. Thank the Lord, God is not fair.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.