**18th Sunday after Pentecost**

**Text:** Matthew 20:1-16

**Theme:** It’s not fair!

**“After they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner: Those who were last, worked one hour, and you made them equal to us who have endured the burden of the day and the scorching heat!’** ”– Matthew 20:11-12

“It’s not fair! It’s just not fair!” If I had a dime for every time I said this growing up, I could retire now. Growing up in a family as the middle brother, with an older sister, older brother and a younger brother, I have to admit I often felt that I was cheated. It’s not fair that my sister gets new clothes but, that I have to wear my brother’s hand me downs. It is not fair that he gets new clothes and I have to wear his. Then my younger brother, “the favorite” always seemed to get anything he wants. It is not fair.

If you grew us with brothers or sisters, or if you have children right now, you have heard this refrain before, and maybe you have even said it once or twice in your life. This does not stop in childhood. When we feel that we are being treated unfairly, or when someone else has received something that you feel you deserve more—it comes up. Sometimes we just think it and other times we blurt it out. **It is not fair! We cry foul!**

In the story we have for today we hear that the workers grumbled against the landowner. You don’t hear them say the word out loud, but you know what they are thinking. ‘**It’s not fair!”** One might be tempted to think that this parable shows us that God has his favorites. He does not treat everyone the same. That God is not fair.

Come with me now and let us look at this story from Jesus and see if we can answer this question. “**Indeed the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2After agreeing to pay the workers a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3He also went out about the third hour and saw others standing unemployed in the marketplace. 4To these he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will give you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6When he went out about the eleventh hour, he found others standing unemployed. He said to them, ‘Why have you stood here all day unemployed?’**

**7“They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’**

**“He told them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8When it was evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last group and ending with the first.’**

**9“When those who were hired around the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius. 10When those who were hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But they each received a denarius too. 11After they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner: 12‘Those who were last worked one hour, and you made them equal to us who have endured the burden of the day and the scorching heat!’**

**13“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not make an agreement with me for a denarius? 14Take what is yours and go. I want to give to the last one hired the same as I also gave to you. 15Can’t I do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16In the same way, the last will be first, and the first, last.”**

Just reading this parable we probably could be caught saying to ourselves ‘well that’s just not fair’ how could the Kingdom of God (being allowed into heaven) be like that! After all, in our world, hard pays off. Isn’t that what we have been taught? The lazy, unmotivated or uninterested never get ahead.

And this parable just seems to scream injustice. You would think that these workers not only have the right to grumble but you would even say that have the right to protest.

Did you know that Parables are short stories told about every day situations, meant to teach us important Biblical truths? They often have very memorable points that stay with the listener. Take for example in this Parable there is a nuance that perhaps you may have overlooked. Listen to what Jesus said.

**8When it was evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last group and ending with the first.’**

**9“When those who were hired around the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius. 10When those who were hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But they each received a denarius too.**

After all, in the story, the landowner could have paid the workers who had been their all day first and moved on successively to the last, but instead he specifically pays the latest workers first, in the sight of the others. This is where the story gets interesting. He purposefully tells the story to upset our notions of fairness and equality, he tells this story to purposefully challenge our notions and assumptions about God, who he is and what he is like. To make us question. Is God fair?

But Jesus is a master storyteller. He knows the way to set up the scene to grab his disciples’ attention. He knows how to build the suspense, and introduce the conflict that creates a good story. And he knows how to resolve that conflict so that his listeners never forget the moral of the story. And that ‘moral of the story’ is not what anyone expects it to be.

You see, the devil is the one who is not fair. He will try to trick us into believing that God is not fair. He will even try to use God’s own words. Like this. Hey, how long have you been a Christian? All your life right? How much have you done for God? How much have you given to God? You have really put in your time right? Just like that passage in the Bible where Paul says: You have work. **(Philippians 2:12)** “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

You should get a reward for that work. Doesn’t’ God say; the worker is How worth his wage? You should get more. More blessing, more because of what you have put in. this is where the Devil uses that nuance of his own. To twitc God’s word. He left out the last part of this verse. “**for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his purpose.”**

How does the landowner answer? **But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not make an agreement with me for a denarius? 14Take what is yours and go. I want to give to the last one hired the same as I also gave to you. 15Can’t I do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16In the same way, the last will be first, and the first, last.”**

The friction between Jesus and His ememies the Scribes and the Pharisees was at a fever pitch. Jesus was in Jerusalem. He was on his way to his final destination—the cross. As the time for our Lord’s sacrificial death drew near, He said some very shocking things.

When some parents brought their little children to Jesus, so that He could bless them, the disciples did not like it! Jesus was too busy and too important to be interrupted by children. Jesus corrected His disciples, He said, **“the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”** ([Matthew 19:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). What? Little children? What have they done to gain God’s favor?

The scribes and Pharisees didn’t see it that way. They thought that heaven belonged to them, because of their religious efforts, and because of their positions, because of their hard work in the church. They deserved to be in the Kingdom! To be first!

Jesus then turned to his disciples and pointed out how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven. Their love and their trust is in their wealth. When Jesus said that **“it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven”** ([Matthew 19:24](javascript:%7b%7d)), the disciples were shocked.

In that day, many assumed that the rich all went to heaven, while the poor went to hell. They believed that wealth was God’s reward for being righteous, while poverty was God’s punishment for sin. Jesus told His disciples that the gospel turned the religion of that day upside-down. He said, **“many who are first will be last, and the last first”** ([Matthew 19:30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Then came Jesus Parable of the Workers in the vineyard. Here is the point. **The first will be last and the last first!** Angry workers represented the devil and his lie that who those who worked the hardest get to heaven first. I deserve to get paid for my work! But that is not the case. In fact the ”first” will not even make it through the door. It is the last. Those who see they cannot get right with God through their own works. **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:4-10**

So, Jesus says in the Parable, if you want to talk about wages, here it is. The wages we deserve. The wages of sin is death. Jesus’ point in this Parable. **God is not fair.**  **And thank God he is not!** He does not give us what we deserve—death—that is called mercy. He gives us what we do not deserve---eternal life in heaven –that is called grace**. The first will be last and the last will be first!**

**Amen**