

Sermon for September 21st, 2014

Fifteenth Sunday of Pentecost, Matthew 15:21-28

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

As I was preparing to write this sermon it **suddenly** dawned on me that I have **not** preached for **5** weeks. (Pause) Now maybe for some of you that might be good news.... But.... I have to say that I **do** like to preach because there is an opportunity to get drawn into the text and **really hear** what it has to say to you and to me as we live our lives in this world of ours.

When I was away on my time in New Mexico I had the chance to learn from some wonderful modern day men and women of God. One of the most **profound** nuggets that I returned with was said by a man named Rob Bell. He said to those of us who are privileged to preach God's Word on Sunday morning—do we **think** to ourselves, '*It's Sunday and I have to SAY SOMETHING.*' Or do we think, '*It's Sunday and I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.*' These are two **very** different perspectives on the role of preacher and teacher. Well, this morning for me '*it's Sunday and I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY*' and that something is '**Sometimes this world is not fair.**'

Now, for some of you that may come as **no** great revelation, but the **reality** of it is that we do not have to look around too far to find the **truth** in that

statement. If you would have been here at church this week you would have seen a **number** of people who came in to receive food cards with many different stories to tell and in various states of the human condition. Some people came in with serious health issues, some people who came in are homeless and afraid as they live on the streets of Riverside, some people came in who are suffering in mind and spirit, and some people who came in travel long distances to receive the **generosity** this church is blessed to give in the \$25 Stater Bros. food cards. As for some reason we are not all on a level playing field. Most certainly, 'sometimes the world is not fair.' Although; as **beloved** children of God we are surely praying for the best that this world has to offer to **all** people; and **yet**, that is not always the case.

As we turn to our gospel lesson for today we hear of a story that Jesus is telling which challenges the idea of fairness as the world sees it and sort of turns it on its head. Now let's think about this parable in **today's** context. Imagine yourself if you will-it is **Saturday** morning, you are a **day** laborer, a person who can really use the money to feed your family, you are **waiting** bright and early at Home Depot to get hired for the day. A man comes to hire a group of you to do some yard work. You have agreed upon the usual **daily wage** for the work. Off you go to work all day in the **hot sun**. Later in the day the same man goes back to Home Depot to get **some more** laborers for the same job. The usual **daily wage** is

agreed upon again. Off they go as well. That happens 3 more times during the course of the day. The laborers are **picked up**, the usual **daily wage** is agreed upon, and off they **go to work** for this same man.

The **end** of the work day arrives. When it comes time to be paid the owner of the house sends his son out to pay you. Everyone has agreed upon the usual **daily wage** when they were hired—right??? Ok, the workers who came last are first, they **get paid** their wages, then next group who came a bit earlier in the day is next, and so on until they get to **your** group who came first thing in the morning. **Everybody** got paid the same wage no matter when they came—You grumble, *“Hey wait a minute. That isn’t fair why are these last guys getting paid the same as us? I was in the **first** group who came here first thing this morning, we sweated and worked all day, and we get the same thing that the guys who came at the end of the day get??? WHAT?? **That’s not fair!!!!**”* (Right here I can hear my dad saying, *“Who ever said life was going to be fair.”*—but that is another story.)

The man who owns the land says to you, *“Friend, I am doing **you** no wrong; did **you** not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to **you** and go. I choose to give to the last workers the same as I give to **you**. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are **you** envious because I am generous?”* There you have it!!!

In this case the land owner is giving to everyone according to their needs; not on the basis of their merit. After all each of the people hired needed to work and make some money. The land owner could have eased the situation by paying the workers in the order in which they arrived. Those who were **hired first** would have left with what they received and **would have never have known** what the others got paid. So what do you suppose the first workers and the rest of us are to learn from this parable?

God's grace and generosity, when all is said and done is for one and for all because honestly if God was giving to us on our merit many times we would fall short. For God there is **no distinction** between those who come to know Him early in life and those who come to know Him on their death bed as there is **no connection** between the length of earthly labor and the size of the heavenly reward when it comes to God. Grace, love, generosity is for all. Such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

What I would like to focus on now for a moment is that **even though** we are not yet in the Kingdom of Heaven, and we may continue to be stuck on the whole idea of fairness, we do have a way to see **God's generosity** at work for us in our lives each and every week as we come to celebrate the Eucharist-or holy communion. **Eu=good, charist=grace, or gift**. At God's table where we receive the good grace or the good gift there is **always** enough. All is fair at God's table.

We are all on equal ground. That equal ground is the foot of the cross. **No one** goes away from the communion table hungry as we all come here with the **same open hands**, we all are fed with the same body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is **no difference** between those who come early or those who come late. *The good gift and the good grace is here for all to receive.*

The Kingdom of Heaven is a place that is **totally different** from our world. A place where **grace abounds** for all, a place where the **comfortable expectations** are withdrawn and **the unexpected** reigns supreme. In this parable Jesus joins those who were the first to be called to understand the world into which we have all been invited to live and to **join Him** in inviting those who come later or those who may not yet have known the world's favor; to the ones who are **sick**, to the ones who are **poor**, and to the ones who have been **overlooked** by society. *Thanks be to our loving God whose grace, mercy, and fairness extends to us all no matter when we arrive. **AMEN.***