

Home Service for September 20, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Although we cannot meet together in the church building we can share worship together in our individual homes. We will continue to work to stay connected and be there for each other during the difficult time. We are going through something never experience before. I hope this will help you worship God today with those who are in your home. Add hymns if possible, too.

Gathering Prayer:

God of grace and God of glory, fill our anxious lives with the knowledge of your encompassing and ever compassionate love. As we react in anger to the injustices of our world, help us to remember the depth of your divine grace, so we may reflect it in word and deed today and always. Amen.

United in one spirit, we are called to stand strongly. United in one mind, we are called to live faithfully. United in one God, we are called to love abundantly.

Opening Prayer:

Love through us, living God, in the power of your Holy Spirit. Love through us, Holy One, by the grace of your child, Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, that we may respond with trust and hope. In your mighty name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Forgive us, Mighty God, when we doubt your strength. Assure us, Faithful God, when we doubt your constant presence. Renew us, Loving God, when we neglect to love others as you have loved us. Empower us with your strength, and encourage us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that we might live with a faith that honors you, and abide with a hope that encourages others to know your love and grace. In Jesus name. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Christ's grace makes us whole, and the Spirit's presence makes us one. Thanks be to God for these wonderful gifts!

Read Psalm 145:1-8:

I will exalt you, my God the King;

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

²Every day I will praise you

and extol your name for ever and ever.

³Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;

his greatness no one can fathom.

⁴One generation commends your works to another;

they tell of your mighty acts.

⁵They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—

and I will meditate on your wonderful works.^[b]

⁶They tell of the power of your awesome works—

and I will proclaim your great deeds.

⁷They celebrate your abundant goodness

and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

⁸The LORD is gracious and compassionate,

slow to anger and rich in love.

Prayers of the People:

Lord of light, in the midst of darkness and fear, you call us to be a community of peace, love and hope. You remind us of the blessings we have and the opportunities to share those blessings with others. We praise and thank you for all these things and for your constant presence with us. Today, we come seeking peace and healing, we offer the names of loved ones who are struggling with illness, with loss, with feelings of alienation and fear. We name these dear ones as we pray for these people, seeking your healing and hope in their lives. As we have lifted up our concerns, we also offer messages of love and rejoicing. Let us offer prayers of Thanksgiving and Joy. Lord, we thank you for your healing mercies and your sustaining love for us. We are confident in your abiding presence with us. Help us to be faithful to you in all times and in all places. Give us the grace to accept the forgiveness you have offered to each of us. For it is in Jesus' name that we offer this prayer. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us

not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Exodus 16:2-15

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” ⁸ Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Philippians 1:21-30

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of

this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit,^[a] striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius^[a] for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

⁹ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Message

As you listened to the gospel lesson being read this morning, did the feeling of unfairness come into your mind. Did you say to yourself, that farmer was being unfair, paying each person the same wage for different number of hours of work.

Now think about your own childhood or your children growing up or maybe your grandchildren. How many times did you hear or say: "That's not fair!" You know, "How come he or she gets to stay up later? Why does he or she get to go first? Why do I have to share it, it is mine?" Now think how many times did you hear or even say: "You're right. It isn't fair. Neither is life, so be quiet and live with it." You may have even experienced or provided a Solomon like response to the sharing the piece of cake or maybe a piece of pie: when one of child gets to split it and then the other one gets to choose which piece they wanted.

At first look, this story seems to be unfair, but let us look at it more closely:

Remember the first verse of this story was: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a." This parable is not about how to run a business. It is not about how we are to treat each other, but it is mainly a parable about how God through Christ treats us. He treats us with grace. No matter when we allow the grace of God into our lives, it is there in its fullness. If we allow that grace come on our death bed, it is still the same grace that some allowed into their lives at the age of 10. Grace is Grace.

Where does this story start? The landowner, who obviously represents God, went out into the marketplace early in the morning to find people to work in his vineyard. He found a bunch of people standing around doing nothing, feeling hopeless and useless. He came upon a bunch of directionless, lost people. And he offered them a place in his kingdom. He gave them a job to do. And they took it. Then he went back to the marketplace again, and here he found other lost and broken people with nothing to do. "He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went."

He did this all day long. He went searching for people. And when he found people, he invited them in; promising them something they had always wanted but had never yet been offered. They didn't go looking for him. He came looking for them; like a shepherd searching for a lost sheep; or a woman searching for a lost coin. If he hadn't come to the marketplace that day; none of them would have worked. None of them would have been paid anything. They all would have been in the same boat. But now, the ones he found first are mad. And they aren't so much mad

at the other workers; they are mad at the vineyard owner! They are mad at his generosity.

“These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us...” “You have made them equal to us...” This parable is not about money; it goes much deeper, to what the money represents. The real issue is superiority.

Again, “You have made them equal to us...”

The kingdom of heaven isn't about rewards. We don't serve God so that He will love us more. We don't serve others because we think it will get us to a higher rung on the ladder of heaven. We serve God and others because it is a privilege to do so. We serve God and others because working for God's Kingdom is a gift in itself.

There is no room for human pride, since the only choice any of us have is either to answer the call of God when it comes or to stand idle and waste our lives altogether. God doesn't want any of our lives to be wasted, so God invites everyone repeatedly, in order to gather as many people as possible into His vineyard. He doesn't hire the laborers late in the day because He needs them; He simply hires them because they are there. And that is how it is for all of us; no matter what time of day we are hired. God found all of us standing around in the marketplace with nothing to do. That's where I was before I heard God's call. How about you?

God calls us because God loves each and every one of us deeply and profoundly.

God calls us because God created us in His image to be in relationship with Him.

God calls us because God's generosity is beyond our wildest imaginations.

God gives us jobs to do in His kingdom.

God gives us purpose, loving work to do on His behalf; not because He needs, but because He loves us. Because He wants us. Because this is what God is like. And there is nothing any of us can do to deserve God's generosity and love!!!

How different would our lives be if we lived with this attitude?

How different would our perspectives be on serving Jesus?

Jesus ends His parable with this: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Some of the laborers are especially blessed to hear the call to come into God’s vineyard early on; but if we experience this labor as a burden, the joy of the gift is lost on us. If it becomes a competition based on merit, we have forgotten where we were when we were first called, and why we were called in the first place.

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”

Where do you see yourself in Jesus’ parable? We are all radically equal and radically valuable in His sight. And so, we are invited by Jesus to allow God to transform our pride, envy, and hardness into joy as we celebrate God’s selfless love toward us and toward all people. We are invited by Jesus to look at ourselves honestly and lovingly, just as God looks at us. We are invited by Jesus to look at others the way God looks at us. And we are invited to turn from holding grudges and competing for rewards—to let go of all the stuff in our lives that keeps us from being joy-filled and grateful people. We are called to let go of everything that makes us less like Jesus. Just let us be thankful for God’s grace. Amen.

Benediction:

Go forth with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Love with the grace of Jesus Christ. Rejoice in the steadfast love of God. Amen.