

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church- September 15<sup>th</sup> 2019

Text - Matthew 20:1-16

### Fairness in God's Kingdom

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. A parable today - a parable that smacks of unfairness – a parable about the Kingdom of God.

A story - It was many years ago. I was the senior Pastor at Our Savior's in Appleton. It had become a large congregation and the setting was Confirmation instruction. It was not uncommon to have 30 to 40 9<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in Confirmation. During a team building exercise, two young men approached me and said that it was unfair that Antonio should be confirmed with the rest of the class at the upcoming ceremony. After I got over the shock of the statement, they went on to say that Antonio misses the classes, doesn't turn in his sermon notes and almost always misses his acolyte assignments. It's important to mention that the two boys making these statements were your typical teenagers at Our Savior's. Came from an affluent family living on the Northside of Appleton in the high rent district. I had baptized them, and they had attended Sunday School faithfully all of their lives. Antonio, on the other hand was new to the church. Came from a situation that was far from ideal. His mom was a single parent and often worked two jobs.

In addition, he struggled at school and probably suffered from some sort of learning disability. I remember saying to the two young men something like, "thanks for your concern, and do me a favor, read Matthew 20:1-16 and report to me next week on what you think it means." I never heard back from them on their report. Oh and yes, of course Antonio was confirmed with his proud Mom in attendance, who had to miss work to enjoy her proud moment.

That story has to do with this parable and our understanding of the Kingdom of God. You just heard the story in the Gospel. Jesus says that a certain landowner goes out at daybreak and finds some workers to pull weeds and pick grapes in his vineyard. They are happy to have work. But at mid-morning he hires some more, and at noon he hires even more. And then, just an hour before quitting time, he hires even more.

Then, Jesus tells us, they all line up to receive their pay; those who were last to be hired were at the front of the line, and to the surprise of everyone, they received a 100 bucks, a full days pay. I'm pretty sure that those who worked the longest began to rub their hands in excitement. Oh Boy! If they got a \$100, we might get a \$1000. What a gig. But, when they got paid they got the same \$100. It's not fair, they cried.

No employer in his right mind would try this today. They would be hounded by union officials and lawyers. No teacher would give an A to both students, one who wrote a paragraph and one who wrote a book. No coach would start an athlete who only practiced 5 minutes. It doesn't seem to work in our world - but remember this is about the Kingdom of God - it's about church stuff and heaven stuff.

So let unpack the Gospel and see what it means for you and me. First, in God's Kingdom, there is room for everyone. You will notice that the landowner didn't reject anyone. He didn't do any racial profiling. He didn't reject those with physical or mental disabilities. He didn't reject those with a different color or sexual orientation. Nobody is excluded in the Kingdom of God or in any church for that matter.

The second thing we learn from the parable is that in the Kingdom of God -ie: our church - everyone was called to work, not just sit in the back row with Jesus. That's really important for us to remember as Pastor Jon comes in a few weeks. Working in the vineyard was hard. They were called to walk the walk and not sit in the shade watching others. How is it going for us? Are we feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, doing it for the least of these my children? If we have gifts, teaching, music, [caring for others, are we using them? Or just watching from the sidelines?](#)

The third thing we learn from the parable is the Lutheran thing. The workers in the parable did not earn their pay by how many hours they worked. They didn't earn their wage by how many grapes they picked. In the same way, we do not gain the Kingdom of Heaven by the good works we do in this world. We gain it by walking the walk. We heed the call of Jesus- we believe in Grace- we know John 3:16. (*Pastor has Congregation say John3:16*). God is gracious, and because of this, we have the promise of eternal life.

And as Paul Harvey says, here is the rest of the story.

Antonio graduated from Fox Valley Tech, works as a plumber, is married with three children. Faithfully attends an ELCA congregation, and to this day knows and believes in the Grace of God.

I pray all of us will as well.

Amen. Let it be so.