

Faith Lutheran Church

Sunday, September 20, 2020
16th Sunday after Pentecost



Call to Worship

We gather together in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Call to Confession

Joined together as Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us confess our sin in the presence of God and one another.

Prayer of Confession (please join in confessing our sins)

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. In Your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear the good news! Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun.

Believe the good news of the gospel: In Jesus Christ+ you are forgiven.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Almighty and eternal God, you show perpetual lovingkindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Readings and Psalm

- **Jonah 3:10--4:11** *God's concern for the city of Nineveh*
- **Psalm 145:1-8** *The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*
- **Philippians 1:21-30** *Standing firm in the gospel*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus tells a parable about God's generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.

⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' ⁷They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?' ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Life just isn't fair. I lost another friend to Covid-19 last weekend. That's the second friend that has walked on due to this deadly virus. Two other acquaintances as well.

Emmeretta was three years older than me. She had a very distinct laugh and she wasn't afraid to use it! Her husband just walked on in mid-December last year. They had one daughter who survives. I'm sure she's thinking right now that life just isn't fair. Losing both parents within nine months.

A little over a year ago, husband and wife, Alvin and Eldora, walked on seventeen days apart. I'm sure their kids didn't think life was fair then either.

There are a lot of things that aren't fair in life. How many of you grew up having the same teacher that your sibling did or, worse yet, your parents did? There's a level of expectation that surrounds you when you have the same teacher as another family member did. If they were a well-behaved student and got good grades, that would be expected of you. Or if they were a goof-off and school prankster, that may be a reputation hard to live down. Many of us had to go through the awkward stages of high school in this situation. Life just isn't fair.

All we need to do is turn on the news every day and we see stories of unjust and unfairness in society. Racial division, a lot of it due to those who have and those who have not. Those who are treated differently because of the color of their skin. Those who are just trying to provide for their families but keep getting beat down whenever it appears they are getting a little ahead.

Employers don't always treat employees fairly. Of course, there are labor laws but not every law is followed to a "t". The gender gap in pay in 2020 shows that women earn 81 cents for every dollar earned by men. That increased from twenty years ago when women earned 73 cents for every dollar earned by men. Women still have a ways to go. Life just isn't fair.

That is also evident in our gospel reading for today. Or at least that's the perception.

A landowner needs to get his crop of grapes harvested and it has to be done rather quickly. He finds some folks eager to work so he hires them and they start working early in the morning. They worked literally from sun-up to sun-down, a solid twelve hours of labor right through the heat of the day.

A few hours later after the early-birds started working, the landowner saw others standing around and figured he could put them to work as well. And they started working.

At noon and at 3:00, still more folks were standing around. The landowner figured he might as well hire them and so he did. And they started working as well.

5:00 came. *Still* more people were standing around. When asked by the landowner why they were just standing there all day, they said it was because no one had hired them. Geez, it's almost quitting time. Were they *truly* looking for work or were they just too lazy and didn't want to get up earlier in the day? We don't actually know, but the landowner decides to hire them.

An hour later, it's quitting time. The landowner gives the manager specific instructions. "Give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first."

Well, the ones who had worked for only about an hour got much more than they thought they would. In fact, they got an entire daily wage for only an hour of work! What a bonus!

The ones that started at 3:00 were next. Heck, they got the same amount and they only worked for three hours!

The noon workers got the same amount for only putting in six hours. Yes, it was during the heat of the day but twelve hour's pay for six hours? That still wasn't a bad deal for them.

And then came those hard-working folks who started at sun up. Worked until sundown. Through the heat of the day. Probably worked their tail off knowing the crop needed to be picked. They watched what all the others were paid. And they got the same as everyone else. A day's wage for a twelve-hour day. I suspect they felt pretty cheated. I think I would too. Life just isn't fair.

So, what's the lesson in all this? Why did Jesus *specifically* tell this parable in the way that the ones who worked all day saw what the ones who worked less time received? Was it to point out that life just isn't fair? Was it to show how cruel and unfair employers can be?

Hearing grumbling, the landowner tells the last group, "Look. I paid you what we agreed upon. You worked for twelve hours and received exactly what I promised. So why are you so upset that I chose to pay everyone the same? It's my money, right? I can do what I want with it."

A colleague shared that, Barbara Brown Taylor, a renowned author and Episcopal priest, wrote a sermon on this passage. "Taylor asked the key question: When we read this parable, why do we tend so immediately to identify with the folks hired at the crack of dawn? Why do we so readily assume that when God's kingdom fully comes, *we* will be the ones tempted to feel upset in that we will also be shown to have been the hardest workers of them all? Who told you or me that we've been working for 12 hours? How do we know that just maybe *our* work totals the measly one hour after all?"

Good questions. Maybe, just maybe, we were one that started working at noon or 3:00. Maybe we were one that started working at 5:00 and avoided the scorching heat of the day. Maybe we were one who got a great reward for doing very little.

Life just isn't fair. We know that.

Whether it's coping with the loss of loved ones who've walked on at a time that we weren't prepared or due to circumstances of a virus that we feel could have been prevented. Whether it's because we feel someone is getting something handed to them and we've worked just as hard, if not harder, and didn't get the extra. Whether it's something as minute as not getting as much ice cream in the flurry as your husband did. Life just isn't fair sometimes.

Thank goodness we have God's grace. Jesus paid the ultimate price through His death so that we might have forgiveness of sins; the sins that keep reminding us of times when life just isn't fair. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life." What a tremendous sacrifice! Did Jesus think that was fair?

And even though I sin again and again, in thought, word, and deed, God continues to forgive me. I can start each morning or noon or 3:00 or 5:00 with a clean slate. Every breath, every hour, every day is a chance for me to be better than I was before. Because of His presence within me, I always have new opportunities to think and do better.

A colleague wrote, "Always remember that grace is a gift. You can't earn it, but you get a lot of it. It's free and abundant. When you go to God in heartfelt prayer, He will always give you what you need. Forget about worrying about getting what you deserve. Grace is getting much more than you deserve."

Yea, maybe life just isn't fair sometimes. Yet, as we hear in 2 Corinthians 9:8, "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." Thanks be to God! **Amen.**

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.
A brief silence.

Generous God, You make the last first, and the first last. Where this gospel challenges the church, equip it for its works of service. Strengthen those who suffer for Christ.

Sun and wind, bushes and worms, cattle and great cities—nothing in creation is outside Your concern, mighty God. In Your mercy, tend to it all. Give us a spirit of generosity toward all You have made.

Where we find envy and create enemies, You provide enough for all. Bring peace to places of conflict and violence. Inspire leaders with creativity and wisdom. Bless the work of negotiators, peacekeepers, and development workers.

Reveal Yourself to all in need as You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, ready to relent from punishing. Accompany judges and lawyers, victims of crime and

those serving sentences. Give fruitful labor and a livelihood to those seeking work.

Even beyond our expectations, You choose to give generously. Grant life, health, and courage to all who are in need. We continue to pray for all who are affected by the coronavirus. Grant comfort and peace to all who are ill, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds and with our voices...(please name your prayer concerns).

We praise You for the generations that have declared Your power to us. Give us faithfulness to follow them, living for Christ, until You call us to join them in the joyful song around His throne. All these things and whatever else You see that we need, we entrust to Your mercy; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...

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

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer *(please join in prayer)*

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what You have first given us-our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of Your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of Him, who offered Himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

Thanks be to God.

Sources:

www.presbyterianmission.org

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ❖ **Pastor Melinda's email HAS CHANGED! It is now:** orlcrev@jamadots.com
- ❖ **Watch Faith's Worship Service Live on Sundays at our Facebook page!** - You can catch our Service at 10:30am every Sunday at www.facebook.com/FaithLC1966 . You can also find us online by searching for **FaithLC1966** in any browser. If you have any questions or comments, please call the church office at (906) 632-7246.
- ❖ **Do you have any Christian music vinyl records?** - Sean in the office knows someone who is interested if you've got any you are looking to get rid of. So if you do, you can call the church office at 906-632-7246.
- ❖ **The Women of Faith (WELCA)** - regret to inform our congregation that we will not be hosting our annual Bazaar & Luncheon due to the possible spread of the Coronavirus. It would normally be held in early October. We appreciate that our women are always so willing to support this event by making salads, desserts, baked goods and crafts and by helping on the day of the Bazaar. Thank you for all that you've contributed in the past. We look forward to your help & generosity next October, 2021 when we hope to host another Bazaar & Luncheon.
- ❖ **YOUTH CAN DRIVE**—We thank you for your contributions of returnable cans and bottles. However, due to COVID-19, we are not able to accept these items at this time. It is a health risk for those who handle the returnable containers. If you so choose, please return the cans and bottles to the store at your convenience and mail your deposit receipt to Faith. A member will then return the deposit receipt to the store for redemption. Thank you!
- ❖ **FORTUNE LAKE LUTHERAN CAMP'S UPCOMING VIRTUAL FALL FEST AUCTION**— We are gearing up for our Virtual Fall Fest Auction! We've got over 80 hand-made quilts and fine art items, and we'll also be auctioning some Fortune Lake experiences! This event is our largest fundraiser of the year, and all proceeds offset the cost of our ministry.

All bidding will take place on our secure auction website:
www.auctria.com/auction/fortunelake

Here is the timeline and information on what to expect:

- **September 23, 12 noon CDT: Virtual Silent Auction Opens**
Bidding will begin for those who have registered on Auctria (see link above).
- **September 24, 3-7pm CDT: In Person Preview in the Chapel**
This socially distanced, masked event will allow people to see the items that are available for bidding. Staff and volunteers will be on hand to assist with registering as online bidders. **NO ITEMS WILL BE SOLD ONSITE**, but Draffle tickets can be purchased for \$5/one ticket or \$10/three tickets.
- **October 3, 10-11am CDT: Virtual LIVE Auction**
Join us remotely for the opportunity to bid on select, high-quality items. The LIVE stream will be broadcast on our Facebook page, and the bidding will take place on Auctria. We are asking tech savvy people to help those who are less confident but want to participate.
- **October 3, 1pm CDT: Virtual Silent Auction Closes**