

9/20/26
17th Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from September 13th – September 19th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: 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.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 18:21-35) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 20:1-16

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. How many times does the landowner go out to hire workers?
2. What is the difference between what the first workers were promised and what they actually received?
3. What do we know about why the workers hired at the eleventh hour were not working earlier?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Where might comparison be getting in the way of gratitude in your life?
2. What is one gift God has given you recently?
3. Describe a time in your life when you have been deeply aware of God's grace in your life.

Memorize this verse: "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:15) When have you received more generosity from someone than you expected, and how did it affect you?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 145:1-8. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

Take a little memory trip with me and think back to your childhood. Think of some of the things children say and, after a moment's reflection, name what you think they say perhaps more than anything else. Maybe, "I love you"? I'd like to think that, but I'm not so sure. When I think back to my own childhood, I'm likely to name three other words: "It's not fair." Do you remember? "It's not fair that I have to do homework before watching T.V." "It's not fair that their parents buy them whatever they want and we have to go without." "It's not fair that..." You can probably fill in the blank and finish that sentence as well as I can. Because if there's one thing we're all born with, it's an innate sense of fairness. That's a powerful and wonderful thing, because that sense of fairness, when developed into maturity, is the foundation for justice and equality: "It's not fair that some ride in the front of the bus while others must stay in the back, that some are paid more for the same work, that some go to bed hungry while others fill landfills with their excess." Yes, our innate sense of fairness can lead to a strong and life-giving sense of justice. But not always. Because our innate sense of fairness tends to be egocentric. We tend to assess fairness in terms of what seems fair not only to us but also for us. We measure fairness in terms of our own wants, needs, hopes, expectations, often with little regard for the wants and needs of others. And unfortunately, this doesn't end with childhood. Which brings us to Jesus' parable about these day laborers. Right up front, it's important to recognize just how tough it was to be a day laborer. These are the folks with no regular employment and so must stand in the town square hoping that some landowner needs extra work done and will hire you. The trouble is, there's usually a lot more laborers than there is labor. And there's no unemployment or social services to fall back on. So, if you were both healthy and lucky, you'd get chosen and work a twelve-hour day and when you were done, receive a day's wage that would provide food for your family for the next day. If you were unlucky or unhealthy, however, you'd be passed over, possibly waiting all day, only to return empty-handed to face the disappointed looks of those who depended on you.

In the parable Jesus tells, everyone gets lucky. Some are chosen early, some more in the late morning, at noon, and midafternoon, and some just an hour before quitting time. No doubt these last were downright flabbergasted when they received a full day's wage for an hour of work. Not because they hadn't wanted to work all day. After all, they'd been there just the same as the others, but they had been passed over, time and again, until right near the end. And so, I suspect they were delighted to discover they would be able to provide, at least for another day, for their families. This act of generosity, however, sets up expectations. Those who had worked all day started doing their mental calculations, anticipating just how much more they would receive than they'd originally expected. To be honest, it's hard to blame them. After all, if the folks who worked just one hour got a full day's wage, wouldn't it be only fair to give the folks who worked twelve long hours a little more, or maybe even a lot more? But that's not what happens. They receive a full day's wage just as they were promised. They are disappointed, maybe even angry. It just doesn't seem fair. But the landowner reminds them that it's totally fair. After all, they are being paid just what was promised. If anything, the landowner is being more than fair to those who were invited late in the day. Why, then, resent such generosity?

Why indeed? Except, perhaps, that's just human nature. Think for a moment, of what this does to the grumbling day laborers. Rather than feeling fortunate to have found work for the day, they feel unfortunate at not having received more. Rather than rejoicing that these other workers can return home blessed to be able to feed their families, they can only begrudge them their good fortune. And rather than be grateful to the landowner who has given them an honest day's wage for an honest day's work, they can only grumble with resentment. And this is part of what makes Jesus so threatening. He offers this same choice over and over again. Grace and mercy of God are available to everyone, including people others have decided are unworthy. His boundary-breaking generosity challenges our need to decide who deserves what. Let's be clear. Jesus offers another way of being in the world. And, by our usual standards, he is not fair. Because Jesus gives us more than we deserve. He invites us to stop keeping score and to live instead in the abundance, courage, and faith of God's generosity.

Thanks be to God,

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Traditional version:

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, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen