

“Something Better than Right”

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Matthew 20:1-16

Grace and Peace be to you from our Gracious God, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's Not Right

But, it's not right. How many times have we heard this? Parents, you know what I'm talking about. That's no fair. How come she gets to go too. What do you mean he gets to go to bed at the same time. Huh...when I was her age, I didn't get to have sleepovers. OK...I'm not naming any names--but I live with a 14&10 yr old.

So the grumbling is familiar to us. Listen again:

*Now when the first came.... They got their usual daily wage. But when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner and said, "These last only worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day...."*

You see, these hard working laborers really did start out early in the morning. They watched others join them at various times throughout the day. And yet at the end of the day, this is what the owner did; He called the laborers and gave them their pay. He was beginning with the last and he handed out paychecks, the usual daily wage. However, it was the same for each and everyone.

And this is where we get to the grumbling. Do you blame them? The other day I drove to the *Baltimore Washington Airport*. Thankfully I allowed extra time (I was afraid I'd get lost) but instead I was in a traffic jam due to construction and an accident. So I crept along with all the others. I merge left when I'm supposed to.

So, we're at a stand still and this car cruises up beside me on the shoulder and tries to sneak in ahead of me. "Hey, that's not right," I grumbled in my empty car. "Think again buster. You're not getting in here. You have to wait like the rest of us." And I creep up really close to the car in front of me so he can't get in. Has that ever happened to you? I wanted the highway patrol to come and set him straight. But wouldn't you know it, the person in the car behind me graciously let him in.

Earning a Living

It's not just kids who want things to be fair. I'm guessing that some of you have watched with frustration as others received privileges and promotions and perks with ease all the while you have worked hard to earn them. In fact, I'd say that our admiration and respect goes for those who show up early and bear the burden of the day. We call it--earning an honest living.

This reminds me of a man from my former congregation who was known as a hard worker and loyal employee. He had high standards for himself and in fact he expected no less from others, especially those closest to him. He not only believed that God helped those who helped themselves but measured their worth accordingly.

But one day, this man who never missed a day of work injured his back and was flat in bed for months. Helpless and idle, he laid there. I don't have to tell you how much he hated that and how things changed for him. He knew it wasn't right. He was no longer earning a living. But guess what? Instead he received a life.

He watched and was astounded as others from the church brought meals to him and his family. (Sound familiar?) He couldn't believe it. He hadn't even been that involved in the church. And then when his sick days ran out, to his utter amazement, he realized that his co-workers, even the ones he criticized most

donated their days into a pool for him to use during recovery. He knew he didn't deserve it but he got it anyway.

Unearned love tapped him on the shoulder and he was able to see his worth in a whole new way. And so it was that he discovered grace---life received as a gift, not earned as a reward. And with a grateful heart he met Christ who helped him at the time when he couldn't help himself.

### Receiving a Life

Let me ask you a question. Are you trying to earn your living? Are you the one who carries the burden of the day, day after day after day? If you are then you will look to Christ to make things right, to make things fair. But let's say that you're beginning to realize that it's not enough. It doesn't satisfy the longings of the soul. Maybe you're feeling the pressure of that burden. Could it be that you're seeing how the merit system fails.

Perhaps you're beginning to wonder if there is not more than earning a living. The story we hear today shows us something better than right It is God's righteousness---grace upon grace, mercy unbounding.

For you see, when it comes right down to it, there is no one who dares lay claim to the better portion of God's goodness. None of us can truthfully say, Yes, I have been with you God from the beginning to the end. In fact, there was only one who truly bore the burden of the day. And that was Jesus.

From the scrutiny of the world, there is nothing right about that Friday long ago when an innocent man was put to death. It is true; he gave up his right to the benefits and gave over those benefits to those who stood idle to the side. In fact, he not only bore the burden of the day, but he carried the burden of sin of all the days for all God's people. You see, it's not fair. It's certainly not right. And Thank God for that.

On my trip to the airport, we finally came out of the traffic jam. I was cruising along on 695 and then to 95 and then I realized – there's 195 and I was in the wrong lane. How could I get over there?

There I was trying to swerve into the exit lane. No one had to let me in. But wouldn't you know it, someone did let me in so that I could get onto the exit and to the airport.

When we find ourselves in the wrong lane, or idle in the marketplace, or simply disengaged from the work of the spirit, we are reminded of the generous welcome to the vineyard.

This is good news for us who tend to scan greener pastures for quick growth rather than digging deep into the fertile but rocky soil of God's Word. This promise is for all of us who may find ourselves on the field's edge standing idle or simply watching, speculating, and measuring but reluctant to get our hands dirty.

How good it is then, that the owner of the land and sea would seek us out. How gracious God is then to take us in, to take all of us into the field and so that we reap the fruits of God's labor. We join the laborers of all times and all places to gather the harvest and feast on the foretaste. The last one to arrive is welcomed by all and given a full course meal.

Maybe these are new fields for you where the lay of the land holds surprises and the unexpected generosity catches you off guard. Perhaps you're wondering if it's really for you. But remember again the gracious landowner. He comes for the laborers again and again. No matter how many hours, days or years you have wasted, he seeks you out for this time and place. And guess what! No matter where you have been or how long you have waited, you are given...Full pay, full benefits, full salvation. Undeserved, freely given. This is for you.

Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. To God be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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