

Worship Resources - No Fair! <https://youtu.be/6U59r93OakQ>

16th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

20th September, 2020

Philippians 1:21-30 CEV / Matthew 20:1-16 CEV

Intro/Prelude

He,

written by Jack Richards and Richard Mullan,
played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/izylUH4F7GU>

Welcome and Call to Worship

Come!

Come and worship, you who woke early and you who slept late; you who come often, and you who don't. Whether we are first or last or somewhere in between, there is room for all of us in God's kingdom, and more than enough grace to go around. Let's worship God together!

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

When we gather in person, we take a moment to greet each other and share words of peace. This week, we will be observing the International Day of Peace on Monday, September 21st, by having a socially distant gathering of our new adult spirituality group, North Star, in our fellowship hall, for a time of reading, prayer, and listening.

I invite you to join us. Details will be available on our website, www.olympicchurch.org as well as in the video description. This morning we are sharing the following video produced a number of years ago which introduces what the International Day of Peace is all about. As we watch this video, let's all think about how we might take time this Monday to promote peace in our own lives and community.

Reflection video

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

posted to YouTube by RootedInPeace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZjbyYi8d5U&feature=youtu.be>

Invocation

Join me in a word of prayer.

Liberating God, we seek your journey. With parted waters, set us free.
With cloud and fire, guide us. With gushing waters, quench our thirst.
With food from heaven, feed us. Draw us out with joy and singing,
that we might know your ways. Amen.

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. Amen.

In our epistle reading this morning from Philippians, Paul talks about what Christian life means to him, and he urges his followers to stand fast in living the Gospel in their lives. As we listen to these words to the church in Philippi, let's think about what living out our faith looks like, not only to ourselves but to others.

Epistle Reading **Philippians 1:21-30 CEV**

If I live, it will be for Christ, and if I die, I will gain even more.

I don't know what to choose. I could keep on living and doing something useful.

It is a hard choice to make. I want to die and be with Christ, because that would be much better.

But I know that all of you still need me. That's why I am sure I will stay on to help you grow and be happy in your faith.

Then, when I visit you again, you will have good reason to take great pride in Christ Jesus because of me.^[a]

Above all else, you must live in a way that brings honor to the good news about Christ. Then, whether I visit you or not, I will hear that all of you think alike. I will know that you are working together and that you are struggling side by side to get others to believe the good news.

Be brave when you face your enemies. Your courage will show them that they are going to be destroyed, and it will show you that you will be saved. God will make all of this happen,

and he has blessed you. Not only do you have faith in Christ, but you suffer for him.

You saw me suffer, and you still hear about my troubles. Now you must suffer in the same way.

Scripture Video Philipians 1:21-30

What Life Means To Paul

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQR90ErbUx4>

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning we can celebrate the joy that Tammy was able to get her dogs back, and also was able to reconcile and reestablish her relationship with her son and his fiancée in the process.

Let's also remember all those this morning who have lost loved ones or homes to the many fires burning right now, as well as those brave people who are fighting to bring them under control. May God also watch over all those affected by the smoke, particularly those who are sensitive to its effects.

We can also take joy that Kathy Edmark is continuing to heal and recover, slowly but surely making progress.

Let's also continue to keep Goldie's sister Shirley in our prayers, as she recently completed her radiation treatment and is struggling with muddled thoughts off and on as a result, as well as keeping Susanna in prayer as she is assisting with Shirley's overnight care.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Generous God, so often we see others as more fortunate than ourselves, as getting more for what they do, as more beloved. Teach us in your time, O God, how your love is much more than just fair.

Teach us how it is a special caring for each and every one of us, tailored just for our own size and shape, no matter what riches others may have, or how many prizes, or how full of fame.

O God, your love comes first and is so much better than all that and completely unearned. We thank you for that, we thank you for providing for us, we thank you for calling us to labour in your vineyard, we thank you for the bread from heaven that feeds us today and for the promise of how you will spread your table for us in the promised land and forever provide bread without price and wine without cost...

Thank you, gracious God, for always giving us much, much more than we can earn or ever deserve. Contrasted with our often calculated way of doing business with one another, your love towards us seems reckless, extravagant, and unbelievable gracious. Forgive us when we consider all of this our right rather than as your gift.... Forgive us too for when we have resented the love you show towards others who have not served you as long as us— for when we have been angry because you have brought joy to others whom we think greater sinners than we—for when we have measured our worth rather than rejoiced in your mercy.

Creator God, you call us to work in your vineyard—to reach out to others in your name and bring your healing word, your gentle touch, your embracing love to them. Help us to be good workers—ones that seek the lost in the market places and village squares; ones who are unafraid to see in a stranger the image of Christ, and in a sinner a brother or sister for whom he died and rose again. Empower us as individuals and as a church to be the kind of ambassadors who know and do your will, so that in meeting us people meet you.

..

Almighty God, hear our prayers for our family and our friends, for our church, our community, and our world. All these things we pray in the name of Christ Jesus, the joy of heaven to earth come down; he who is our life and our hope, our daily bread, and our rock and our refuge. Amen.

Our gospel lesson this morning is another parable from Jesus. In this parable, we are given a lesson on what is just and fair, from God's perspective. As we listen to these words from Matthew, let's reflect on how we judge what is fair and what isn't, and if that's really our call to make.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 20:1-16 CEV

As Jesus was telling what the kingdom of heaven would be like, he said:

Early one morning a man went out to hire some workers for his vineyard.

After he had agreed to pay them the usual amount for a day's work, he sent them off to his vineyard.

About nine that morning, the man saw some other people standing in the market with nothing to do.

He said he would pay them what was fair, if they would work in his vineyard.

So they went. At noon and again about three in the afternoon he returned to the market. And each time he made the same agreement with others who were loafing around with nothing to do.

Finally, about five in the afternoon the man went back and found some others standing there. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

"Because no one has hired us," they answered. Then he told them to go work in his vineyard.

That evening the owner of the vineyard told the man in charge of the workers to call them in and give them their money. He also told the man to begin with the ones who were hired last.

When the workers arrived, the ones who had been hired at five in the afternoon were given a full day's pay.

The workers who had been hired first thought they would be given more than the others. But when they were given the same, they began complaining to the owner of the vineyard.

They said, "The ones who were hired last worked for only one hour. But you paid them the same that you did us. And we worked in the hot sun all day long!"

The owner answered one of them, "Friend, I didn't cheat you. I paid you exactly what we agreed on.

Take your money now and go! What business is it of yours if I want to pay them the same that I paid you?

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Why should you be jealous, if I want to be generous?"

Jesus then said, "So it is. Everyone who is now first will be last, and everyone who is last will be first."

Scripture Video **Matthew 20:1-16** **Workers In A Vineyard**

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LQJYv34nc4>

Message – No Fair!

It's funny for a country that so identifies with Western culture and values, when it comes to our conception of fairness, we really cling to a rather Eastern notion, that of Karma. Popular in Eastern religions, to put it in simple terms, if someone does something bad, something bad will happen to them. It's a concept I think it's safe to say many of us have really latched onto, isn't it? In fact, we almost wish it on people. Of course, we put our own Christian spin on it. Instead of saying "Karma will get them" we'll often say something like, "we all face the same judgment" or "we'll all be giving an account before God someday." But is that how our scripture today tells us God works?

Does the Almighty have the same standards when it comes to fairness? Well, God's sense of justice doesn't jive with what most of us would consider to be "fair." It's not the way we think; it's not the way we have organized the world. It blows apart everything we think we know and believe about the economics of life.

We think everything has a price, or should. We instinctively keep a tally of what we owe and what is owed us. Usually the latter is much higher than the former. This tally makes up a huge amount of our identity, an identity that the divine standard for forgiveness shows to be totally false. Because that's a lot of what this parable is about, under the surface. It's about showing that God has a whole different set of values than those we work with in this world. Our system makes clear what we value, by keeping those tallies, by assigning worth, equating everything with a value.

There's a story about a young college graduate who was interviewing for their first job in their new career. Reaching the end of the job interview, the Human Resources Person asked the young accountant, "What starting salary were you thinking about?" The Accountant said, "In the neighborhood of 100,000 a year, depending on the benefits package." The interviewer said, "Well, what would you say to a package of 5 weeks vacation, full medical and dental, Company Retirement Fund to 50% of salary, Executive Share Option Scheme, Profit Related Pay and a

company car leased every 2 years - say, a 5 series BMW?" The Accountant sat up straight and said, "Wow! Are you kidding?" The interviewer replied, "Yes, but you started it."

That's kind of the problem we have when we are trying to compare our sense of fairness and justice with God's kin-dom standards, it's comparing apples to oranges. The first will be last and the last will be first is not karma, but rather that everyone gets what they need—not what they deserve. Such a parable as this should be a clear signal that Jesus is presenting a very different world-view than the achievement contest we all like to play in our Western, monetary valued culture. But that's the reason Jesus used a parable to teach us this lesson. Parables are always trying to subvert business as usual using paradox and contradiction to undo our reliance on what we think is logic. In effect, it's telling us a story that defines normal to be the complete opposite of what we've been taught normal is. Yet we often do not let parables do that for us. Our dominant way of thinking is so in control that we try to figure them out inside of our existing consciousness, make them fit into what's the norm in our culture, and if we can't do that, we just ignore them or consider them out of date.

But Jesus is making the point here as he so frequently does, that the kin-dom life we are to be living into now in our Christian community, is quite different from what our worldly culture dictates. It's not how much we get that matters, it's that we get enough that matters. It's not that he or she got paid the same for less work, it's that you all got paid enough to meet your needs. To paraphrase Einstein, he once said that "No problem can be solved by the same way of thinking that caused it in the first place."

Parables aim to subvert our old consciousness and offer us a way through by utterly re-framing our worldview. Too often the biblical text is not a transformative document and does not bring about a "new creation," because we pull it inside of our own security systems and what we call "common sense."

The questions this text generates have led Christian commentators throughout the years to try to find some other acceptable explanation for the vineyard owner's treatment of these late-coming laborers. Some have suggested that he pays them so generously out of his own compassion for their need—not a bad explanation, I suppose. Others have thought he was rewarding their willingness to respond to his call with confidence and faith. Others have speculated that the workers were actually doing him a great favor, because the harvest was very urgent, he needed their help, and he was grateful they were willing to step in at the very last minute.

But once we find ways to rationalize the paradox of a parable, once we make it fit our criteria, no divine breakthrough is possible.

Frankly speaking, much of Scripture, then, has become largely harmless and forgettable. How much do we really let scripture transform us? Can we get past our own sense of what's fair, what's forgivable and forgettable? Or are we stuck in the ruts of our own sense of justice? It's

certainly not easy to change how we've thought, or more accurately, been trained and conditioned to think, for our whole lives. It's difficult to completely change what we value, those norms of what achievement, success, & fairness mean. But yet that's what we're called to do.

Paul tells us in Philippians that we are to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. I would imagine that would probably include living lives in accordance with the values he presents. If God can extend the same grace and forgiveness to the one who comes in the last hour as the one who has been there all along, why can't we? As long as we have the necessary grace extended to us, can we, or better yet, should we begrudge others the same opportunity? And why does it matter to us? This is how discord spreads throughout the community. This sense of being wronged, of not being treated justly or fairly. As long as we compare ourselves to others, as long as we have the need to "keep up with the Jones's," we will never be satisfied, and we will open the door to resentment, to jealousy, to bitterness.

This is the heart of much of what Christ preached and taught. Don't be attached to the world, to stuff, to placing value on earthly riches and the honor system it promotes. Not because Jesus had a deep attachment to socialism, but because he knows the discord and tension that value system leads to. It's as old as scripture itself. Do not covet what your neighbor has.

We see it in the news every day. This group or that group does not perceive themselves as being valued the same as they used to be. They aren't being treated "fairly" or "justly" because they perceive they are somehow being valued less. Yet so often, they are the very ones who have the history of the most privilege, see losing that privilege as not being fair. Which certainly differs from the very real discrimination that still exists. That has become abundantly clear in recent events.

But if your criteria is like our story, that you are getting the same pay for a day as everybody else but you are working a full day when others aren't, then that's the kind of last being first and first being last that Jesus is talking about. You are both getting what you need, that's the only justice to be considered. It's not a lesson meant to be something we find comfortable.

Like most parables, it's something we will have to wrestle with. And we've obviously been doing that as Western culture, considering two millennia later, I'm still preaching on this text and the cultural values that obviously haven't changed much over that time either. But it's something to think about when you see folks protesting the loss of their "culture, their way of life." If it's based on what the world considers fair and just, is that such a bad thing?

Think about this parable when you wish "Karma" on somebody. Is that how God really rolls? Think about this parable when you start to feel resentment, or jealousy towards another because of their tally being bigger than yours. Because all those negative feelings are what this lesson is trying to prevent.

In telling this parable of the laborers in the vineyard – the ones who worked different amounts for the same pay – Jesus wants us to know that God would have us concentrate on our own spiritual condition, not spending time and energy considering those of everyone else, and to accept our ultimate worth and our ultimate purpose without comparing our contributions to those of others. Today we have heard Jesus turn one of our normal, worldly views upside down. In so doing, according to our faith, he actually places those values right-side up.

Today's parable teaches that life is from God's point of view, not a matter of human fairness or unfairness. It is not a matter of deserving or undeserving. Through today's parable, Jesus reminds us that whatever we have is, after all, a gift from God. Whatever we have is more than we could ever earn. God is overwhelmingly generous. It is enough that we have the profound privilege of laboring and serving in God's vineyard. It all boils down to what we value. Does it match what God values, what is important in the kingdom that Jesus speaks of?

I pray we seek that same understanding, that we express gratitude for the grace we've been given, and extend our own grace to others, without judging their worth, because none of us have earned that wage. Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. As we listen to this interlude, played by Annie, let's give some thought as to how we model and promote God's fairness and grace in our own lives, and how we as individuals, and as a community can extend that fairness and grace to others.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] **Marvelous Grace Of Our Loving Lord,**

written by Julia H. Johnston,
played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/PCPKHjiFxBk>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

God,
you are bighearted with no limitation. You overgive and overpay,
handing us not only the rewards due us, but heaping on us the
fortunes of everlasting life and love.

We thank you that heaven is not just like our earth, that grace does
not abide by our rules We are grateful that our little ways open out
when we listen to you.

Lavish your spirit of kindness upon us. Help us give and never count
the cost.

Blessing/Assurance

Go out from here

as workers in God's upside-down kingdom,
where the last are first and the first are last,
where needs are met in miraculous ways,
and there is grace enough for all!

And may the blessing of God,
the love of Jesus Christ,
and the presence of the Holy Spirit
surround you and sustain you in the coming days.

Amen.

Postlude

The Lord Bless And Keep You,

played by church musician Annie Center

https://youtu.be/zMPpJ_QVybY