

SERMON – PASTOR GREG
24.09.2023

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. How many times have you heard the words: 'It is not fair!?' How many times have you said them? Let us pray.

The Gospel reading for this day is Matthew 20 and it begins with Jesus saying: *The kingdom of heaven is like...* Matthew's gospel account has some fifty references to the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God and 'the kingdom'. In Matthew 3:2 we hear John the Baptist proclaiming: *Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near*. In 4:17 it is Jesus who proclaims the same word: *Repent, for the heaven is near*. His beatitudes begin with: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* and they end with: *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. And the primary biblical understanding of 'righteousness' is 'to be in a right and proper relationship with God' and that only happens through faith in Jesus Christ. And of course Jesus taught many parables revealing the Kingdom of heaven.

What is the Kingdom of Heaven/of God? It is God's sovereign, dynamic and eschatological rule over all of creation. It has begun but will only be completed and perfected on the Last Day. Luther writes: God's kingdom comes to us...when the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as children of God, lead holy lives in accordance with it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven!

What is it to live under God's dynamic, sovereign, eschatological and loving rule? The parable for this day speaks of justice and mercy- of what we deserve and of what God desires to give us. It calls us to live the same way. It is a familiar parable and it is one which I love sharing with new Christians. So many times I hear the words: It is not fair! The very same reaction revealed in the parable.

A landowner has gone to the marketplace to hire workers. I remember a movie- I think it was called ON THE WATERFRONT- where, in the time of the Great Depression, men would mill around the factory gates hoping to be hired for the day. A foreman would come out and out of the hundred or so men wanting to work he would choose only what he needed. It might be fifty or sixty and the rest had no work and hence no money to feed themselves or their families. In our story the landowner has gone out at 6.00 am, then at 9.00 am, then at 12 pm and then at 3pm and finally at 5pm. Some had worked 12 hours in hot sun and a few had only worked one hour. Then came to time to receive their wages- their reward for all the hard work they had put in. It is easy to imagine the anger and the grumbling among those who had worked all day long when they saw those who had only worked one hour- and then- in the cool of the evening. It is not fair!

But the men who had worked the twelve hours got what they deserved- they got what was agreed- they got justice. Wikipedia: **Justice**, in its broadest sense, is the concept that individuals are to be treated in a manner that is equitable and fair. To achieve justice, individuals should receive that which they deserve.

Think about those last words: individuals should receive that which they deserve. In the OT reading the people of God had been freed from a life of slavery. They had cried out to God who had sent Moses to deliver them and they were on the way to the Promised Land. They had done nothing to earn God's salvation but in His grace and mercy and because of the promised He had made to Abraham, God came and saved them. And their response? **Exodus 16:2-15:** ² *In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.* ³ *The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.'* Grumbling and murmuring and disobedience- imagine if God had given them what they deserved- instead God sent manna from heaven and quail for food but still they rebelled and did not trust God and so they finally did get what they deserved- that whole generation- apart for Joshua and Caleb- died in the desert.

God is *the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, maintain love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does leave the guilty unpunished-* Justice must be done.

In Matthew 12:36 Jesus says: *I tell you that all people will have to give account on the Day of Judgement for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.* Our words, our actions and even our thoughts (Ps 139) will be judged! Who then can be saved? And this is the very same word spoken by the disciples just before our reading this morning: *I tell you, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

We don't get what we deserve. God does not bring his holy and righteous judgment upon us because HE SO LOVED THE WORD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON. We don't get justice- we get mercy.

And our response is to be gracious and loving and merciful just as Christ is to us. Life is not fair. Some of us endure great suffering while others endure only a little. But we all receive the same reward- because it is gift- it is life for ever in the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus Christ- True Man and True God. Amen.