

# God's Generosity Will Indeed Undo All We Have Come to Know and Expect"

## Matthew 20: 1-16

After a few weeks of worshipping in different places, worshipping in the park, worshipping in the midst of fall festival's craziness, we are back to worshipping once again in our sanctuary. We pick up again today with the Gospel of Matthew and what do we come back to? This story, this parable, this uncomfortable reminder of how grace really works. If I had been smart, like so many of my colleagues who I talked with this week, I would have avoided this particular text all together. I would have gone with another lectionary text. But again the options weren't pretty. Our choices included: focusing on the Exodus text where we get a story of how the Israelites were complaining in the desert, nothing new there, and how again God shows them grace, this time by sending bread from heaven to satisfy their needs or...or we could have gone with Paul's letter to the Philippians in which he tells them God has been gracious to them in their suffering, never leaving their side, always standing next to them. In this particular part of Philippians, Paul even goes as far as saying that God has given them the privilege to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ, the same privilege he holds and celebrates.

In all the lectionary texts for today, we get in some form or another the uncomfortable reminder of how grace really works. We are reminded that grace

doesn't follow our rules. That grace takes our definition of fairness and flips it upside down. In all of these stories, heck in all of our Bible, we are reminded that grace doesn't ask our permission or opinion in deciding who is worthy and who is not. Instead, at its core, our faith story tells us that God is going to keep extending grace to all worthy or not. God is going to share grace upon grace upon grace with all of God's children.

And, let's be honest, doesn't that just make us mad?

Now, of course, I'm not talking about anyone here. I'm talking about you know those other people...those people who forget it was grace that taught our hearts to fear and grace our fears relieved, you know those people who question whether or not a person is worthy to receive such a gift. I'm talking about all those other people who take advantage of the system, who don't deserve a second chance. Please hear me say that I'm not referring to anyone here when I say that people always get angry, frustrated even offended with grace is extended to other people, especially when the people don't look like us, when the people don't think like us. Some people get so offended when grace is extended to others, especially if it goes to the people we don't think deserve it.

Now again, I'm not talking about anyone here. No, we would never do anything like that. We always show grace upon grace to others, especially when we

are driving or when we go shopping at our local stores. We would never grumble under our breaths about the unfairness of it all, questioning why that person get so much and we only got a small portion. We would never say things like “Who does she think she is? I’ve done all the work and what does she do? She jumps in at the last minute and takes all the credit. No, I know I’m preaching to the choir here today. As people of faith, ones who love to talk about grace every Sunday, we always show grace to others. We never forget, that regardless of the situation, grace was first shown to us, whether we deserved it or not, whether we asked for it or not. Grace has been is now and will forever be shared with us. We never forget how that gift made us feel, how it changed us. We would never forget how it opened our eyes to the presence of God in our midst. No, that’s other people. I know no one here would ever get offended or upset if and when grace is shown to others, whether they deserve it or not.

Okay, I’ll admit I say all this rather tongue in cheek because Lord knows if anyone really wanted to see how often I forget the importance of grace in my life, the importance of extending grace to others, all they would have to do is come to the car pick up line at the elementary school on any given day. They would see the lack of remembering this important lesson being lived out by me loud and clear, especially when that first parent won’t pull up to the end of the curb. Just pull up already...move forward...come on!

Okay, breathe in, breathe out. See how the unfairness of this haunts me every day.

Maybe that's why this parable bugs me so much. Yes, I know that the purpose of parables is to get us thinking differently about our faith. Parables are supposed to get us thinking critically about the world around us. They are supposed to help us see how God works in our world. But does this one have to be so brutally honest?

I say this because usually every time I read this text, I start by scoffing at the workers who are paid last. I smugly say to myself, I would never be like that. Can't they show just a little generosity to others? Can't they offer just a little bit of grace? Then after a little time passes, I find myself offended by the landowner's generosity. I find myself saying things like well, that first group did work longer. They should be rewarded. They did put in the longest time. They should be given something special. And then usually as the words of the landowner are still running through my mind, I am humbled before God. I am again reminded of God's amazing grace, remembering all those times when grace upon grace was shown to me. Grace was given to me freely. It was given to me abundantly. There was not question of whether or not I was worthy. God showered me with grace out of God's love for me as God's own beloved child. Every time I read this parable, I give thanks that God is God and I am not.

Whether it is the first time we read this parable or whether we are reading it for the 100<sup>th</sup> time, this uncomfortable reminder of how God's grace really works always shows up, leaving us wondering when as people of faith, we forgot the difference between fairness and grace....because believe me...there is a difference. And as people of faith, ones who have been given grace upon grace, we should be the very ones who never ever forget this difference.

Because you see, here is the knowledge that this parable confronts us with, knowledge that we seem to forget time and time again, this parable reminds us that we serve a loving grace filled God whose generosity knows no limits. It reminds us that we are in a relationship with our God, our God who embraces us as we are, our God who sees all the good, all the bad, all the ugly, and all the breath-takingly beautiful...and still...still loves us more than we will ever know. This uncomfortable reminder of how grace really works calls us to give thanks to our God each and every day because we know, we know there is a difference between our God being fair and our God showing us grace. Believe me....more often than I would like to admit, I know that there have been times in my life, times along my faith journey when it was only because of the gift of God's grace that I was pulled from the darkness and my sin sick soul was renewed. It was God's grace, freely and abundantly given to me which brought me back to life. It was God's amazing grace which taught my heart to sing!

This text, this story, this uncomfortable reminder of how grace really works again invites us as people of faith to take another glimpse... to take another glance at our understanding of the Kingdom of God, to take another look at how we really honestly respond and react when God's grace is shared equally with all. This text invites us as ones who follow a Risen Savior, a Savior who has showered each and every one of us with grace upon grace, this parable invites us through our words, through our actions to reflect a vision of the Kingdom of God here on earth, a vision where compassion outshines fairness each and every time. This uncomfortable reminder of how God's grace really works reminds us that we have been given God's grace time and time again, not because we are the only ones who deserve it. But because our God first embraced us. Our God first showed us just how life transforming this grace could really be. And now we are called to extend it to others, regardless of the situation, always remember how it was first shown to us by a God who loves us more than we can imagine.

Or let me say it this way...a few years ago a particular CEO made headlines because he decided to give all his employees a raise, bringing them all up to the same salary level. How he did this always seems to get lost in the mix. He decided to reduce his own salary by 90% so that all of his workers would be given what they needed. His shareholders were angry because they feared the profit margin would drop as the business lost clients. His own brother sued him because he

didn't think it was fair. Even some of this guy's own employees left because they didn't think it was right that some of the lower level workers would receive the same pay as they did.

Everyone said give it a year and this guy will see that what he did was wrong. So a few weeks ago, after the year "experiment" was up, this CEO was asked what he learned. He said his biggest lesson in all this was in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "Comparison is thief of joy."

As people of faith, who stand before the cross, humbled by God's gift of grace, by God's gift of love, we give thanks...we give that God is God and we are not. We give thanks that God's generosity really does undo everything we know and have come to expect. We give thanks that we know there is no greater gift which can be given to us than God's amazing grace. Thanks be to God! Amen.