

Home Worship September 20th Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Announcements St. Mark's continues outdoor worship every Sunday in September weather permitting. Please dress accordingly with chair and mask. We continue Food Pantry donations, Neighbors in Need and the September focus is on CROP walk donations.

Confession and Forgiveness.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God,
who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. *Silence is kept for reflection.*

Faithful God, have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Forgiveness God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims:

Your sins are forgiven in the name of ☩ Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and eternal God, you show perpetual loving kindness 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.

Psalm 145:1-8

I will exalt you, my God and king, and bless your name forever and ever.

²Every day will I bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

³Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised! There is no end to your greatness.

⁴One generation shall praise your works to another and shall declare your power.

⁵I will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty and all your marvelous works.

⁶They shall tell of the might of your wondrous acts, and I will recount your greatness.

⁷They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness; they shall sing joyfully of your righteousness.

⁸The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 20:1-16 Glory to you O Lord

Jesus tells a parable about God's generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” The word of the Lord. **Praise to you O Christ**

Sermon

Theologian Frederich Buechner once wrote “*the best way to read the bible is to listen to the questions in each story.*” In the “Parable of the Generous Landowner” there are many questions. As Matthew tells it, a landowner goes out to the marketplace early in the morning to gather day workers for his vineyard. After agreeing to pay them each a day’s living wage he sends them off to work. During the day, he returns to the marketplace *four more times* — at 9:00am, at noon, at 3:00pm, and even at 5:00, one hour before quitting time — and hires everyone he finds there, promising to pay them each “*whatever is right*” at the end of the day.

When the workday is over, the landowner tells his manager to pay the workers. But he tells him to do so in an odd way. Pay them in reverse order, he tells his manager, starting with those who worked the *least number of hours*, and ending with those who worked a full day. The manager pays each laborer exactly the same amount — a full days wage. The workers who worked all day were enraged and protested the unfairness of the landowner: “*These last have worked only one hour,*” they say, “*and you have made them equal to us who have worked all day and the scorching heat.*” The landowner deflects with a question: “*Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?*”

We know how the world is supposed to work. Time is money, and fair is fair. Equal pay for equal work is fair. Equal pay for unequal work is NOT fair. But God — if the landowner in this parable represents God — is NOT fair. God, it turns out, does not believe that the best place to be is at the front of the line. He isn't interested in showing favor to the best and the biggest and the brightest — the workers with the most education, successful professional achievements, or those who *live in the best part of town*. This God is not obsessed with who deserves what. In fact, he doesn't even ask why some workers were able to start at dawn and others were not. All that he's obsessed with is making sure that every last person gets a place in his vineyard — the early bird and the latecomer, the able-bodied and the in poor health, the young and the old, the popular and the forgotten.

Let's ask questions. Why *did* some workers end up unemployed until 5pm? The parable is very clear: *because no one would hire them*. Perhaps they weren't as literate, educated, or skilled as the others. Perhaps they had children to care for at home. Maybe they had transportation difficulties. Maybe they were disabled, or didn't have green cards, or suffered discrimination. Whatever the case may be, the landowner doesn't ask these workers to defend themselves. He just makes sure that every worker ends the day with the dignity and security of a living wage — the ability to go home that night and feed his family. “*Are you envious because I am generous?*” asks God. The Greek translation is: “*Is your eye evil because I am good?*”

Isn't it interesting that the landowner insisted on paying the workers in reverse order? He made sure that the first workers saw how much money the last ones received. There would have less trouble if the all-day workers were paid first, sending them home before they could see what the “*less deserving*” workers received. But no, the landowner wanted them to see what kind of vineyard he ran. He wanted them to experience radical generosity. He wanted them to surrender their envy and join the party.

Maybe, if God's generosity offends us so much, it's because we don't have eyes to see where we actually stand in the line of God's overflowing grace and kindness.

Listen for the questions. When you hear the question that is your question, then you have already begun to hear much. God is generous. God loves everyone in the line whether they are first, last or in the middle. Love and salvation is for everyone. That is some of the good news. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence*. O God, you make the last first, and the first last. Give resources and courage to the churches around the globe that have few resources. When ministry in this time is so difficult, inspire bishops, pastors, deacons, and congregational leaders in their service.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Continue your care for your whole creation: sun and wind, cities and farms, especially those who are preparing to harvest. Make us into extensions of your care. To places of conflict and

violence, bring peace, especially to the cities of our nation. Bless the work of negotiators, peacekeepers, and development workers. Enlighten our nation, the nations we call friends, and the nations that are deemed our enemies. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

To all who are suffering, show your mercy. We pray for firefighters, for communities devastated by fire, for all who suffer injustice, for migrants who seek safety, for all who are imprisoned, for victims of crime, for the unemployed, for students and faculty during the pandemic, for medical workers, for all who are hungry: O God, the list of the needy is so long.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give health and wholeness to all who are sick, and to those we name before you here: especially Kent Anders, Karla Gipe, Trish Patterson, Marcia Printz, Lyle Reap and Brad Shippert. For those in care facilities: Sibyl, Barb, Lois, Tammy, Trudy, Jessica, Hazel, Jeanne and Linda. We pray for those in military service: Logan , JJ, Kevin Jr., Bryan, Dustin, Brad and Travis).

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You show mercy beyond our expectations, far beyond our deserving. Hear now our personal prayers. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Gathered into one by the power of the Holy Spirit we pray as Jesus taught

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

Blessing

Mothering God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

Thanks be to God.