

“God Will Be God”

Date: Sept. 21, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Isaiah 55:6-11; Matthew 20:1-16

Theme: Grace, God’s nature

Occasion: 15th Sunday After Pentecost

“It’s not fair!” How many parents have heard that complaint in their house? “How come she gets to do that, and I didn’t, when I was her age?” “How come I get a dollar for allowance and he gets five?” “Why do I have to do chores? It’s not fair!”

Many parents who try to be fair to their children only want to be appreciated for loving their children. And yet, the kids are always trying to “keep score,” forgetting the days when they benefitted more than their siblings did.

But how often do we adults also complain about life? “It isn’t fair!” Two men who labor hard in a manufacturing plant are sitting together having lunch one day. They happen to catch a glimpse of a rock star on television, prancing around on stage. They know the rock star makes millions of dollars doing that. So, one worker complains to the other, “That ain’t work!”

On a football field, the lineman are smashing into their opponents on every play. They’re aching from bruises at the end of the game. At a critical moment in the game, a small player walks onto the field to kick the extra point or a field goal. The place kicker is only on the field for a few minutes of the game. And yet, he might make the same amount of money as a lineman who plays the entire game.

Is it fair? Jesus tells a parable about an employer who needs workers. He hires some of them at the break of dawn, some of them at 9:00, 12:00, 3:00 and 5:00. At the end of the day he pays them all

the same wage. The ones who started to work at 6 in the morning complain, “It isn’t fair.”

And I agree, it’s not fair – *if* you’re talking about fair labor practices. But this parable is not about economics and the labor market. This parable is about the nature of God. Jesus is making the point that God is gracious and loving. God will give His gifts to the ones He wants to, not to the ones that **we** feel deserve His love.

In our way of looking at things, it doesn’t seem fair that the person who works for ten hours should be paid no more than the person who only works three hours. And it isn’t. But who promised that life will always be fair? Certainly God hasn’t.

Take for example a beautiful, talented young woman of 20 who is stricken with leukemia and dies. Her father is a drunken, no good, bum of a man, and yet he’s still living at age 70. What is fair about that? I can’t see it. Life is not always fair.

God does not always act as we think God should act. We might even think that we know better than God. In fact we might be tempted to “play God,” believing that we know better than God how the world should run. “If we were in charge, things would be different.” We might be tempted to believe that we are God, or smarter than God.

But Isaiah 55: 8-9 says: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Why do we so quickly forget that the most basic kindergarten lesson in spirituality is this: “God is God, and we are not.” Exodus 20:3, the first of the Ten Commandments states, “Have no other gods

before me.” Maybe we don’t make any golden calves and bow down in front of them and worship. But we have easily made ourselves mini-gods. But only God is God. We are not.

In the parable that Jesus told about the landowner and the workers, Jesus provides us a glimpse at the difference between God’s design and human desires. The land-owners’ generosity is bestowed on those last-hired workers.

Why? for a reason only known to him. He does not explain or apologize for the accounting system that lavishes the same wage on everyone hired. The only response the landowner gives to the disgruntled, first-hired workers is this: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?”

Is God not allowed to do what God chooses with what belongs to God? God will be God. God’s grace is surprising to us. It’s unexpected. It’s not what we might do. It doesn’t seem fair. But in God’s eyes, there is a fundamental rightness about it.

It may not seem fair, but it’s the right thing to do. Fairness has to do with comparing the fortunes of one person with the fortunes of another person. But rightness has to do with *the ultimate resolution* of things.

To us, it may not seem fair that God would choose to forgive a repentant murderer, when we’ve been good people all our lives. Why should they receive God’s grace and forgiveness, and the hope of heaven, when we’ve tried to do the right thing all of our lives?

But God is God, and we are not. You see, God is love. We don’t say that God practices love, or that God dispenses love, or that

God produces love. God *is* love. We may not always understand why certain things happen, but let us never forget that God is love.

We will continue to be surprised at the people whom God chooses to bless. And we will continue to be baffled when life seems unfair. But God is still love. Can we hold on to that belief, can we affirm that, even when life seems unfair? God is love.

God is merciful and God will forgive whom God wishes to forgive. We might continue to hold on to a grudge, or wish for that person to be punished. But if God forgives, that person is forgiven.

There are many on death-row who will pay for their crimes with the death penalty. But they will still receive eternal life, because they have repented, asked forgiveness and sought God's grace. God will be God. It is God's nature to love extravagantly.

Now, this may be hard to accept, but we are not in charge of the universe. We may think that we have control over a number of things. But in reality we have control over very little. Our spouses, our children, our health, other people – we have no control. We may have the illusion that we control these things, but we're not in charge. God is. God is God and we are not. God will be God.

There are some very practical lessons to be learned when we face this reality. For example, when we pray, we don't tell God what to do. God will be God. God does not need us to tell Him how to do His job. Prayer changes us more than it changes the mind of God. God will be God.

What about when bad things happen? Does your faith in God change? Is God still worthy of our praise and worship and devotion? When bad things happen, has God stopped being God? Never.

Hear what it says in Deuteronomy 31:8. “He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged.”

Do you hear that, people of God? He will never leave us nor forsake us? Life may seem unfair. But God’s love is trustworthy. On that you can always depend. We may not understand *why*, but we can always trust that God’s love is steadfast and eternal.

God will be God. He does not change. His love is from everlasting to everlasting. We may not understand why God loves certain people. We may question God’s justice and fairness in life.

But the great message of Jesus Christ is that God’s love is freely given. It is amazing grace. I do not understand why God loves the way He does. But I rejoice that God does not keep score the way most human beings do.

God is willing to break the chains that bind us, in our sin. And set us free. When we realize, “I am not God. Therefore I will let God be God,” then we have taken the first step of the spiritual journey. Let us pray:

“O God, soften our hard hearts. Help us to see the sin in our own lives before looking for the sin in others. Move us to confession, and then to repentance, the change of heart that leads to a new life. Thank you for your amazing grace. My chains are gone. I’ve been set free. Alleluia. Amen.”