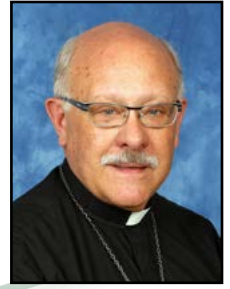




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 24, 2017

But, this isn't fair!

Matthew 20:1-16

Marking, on this Lord's Day, the third in a series of sermons, setting again the foundation of our life together: **Word Alone** – Scripture, **Grace Alone** – Holy Baptism, and today, **Faith Alone** – Holy Communion. The tether for our pathways to renewal.

As in past weeks, we begin with a moment of silence---for prayer, for focus, remembering that Sabbath Time is God's time where we are called to be truly in Holy Spirit time, to be led, to trust, to deepen our relationship with God and with one another.....Now, to the Word of God...Matthew's account of the life of Jesus, on the pathway of loving service.

Jesus has been in ministry in Galilee, the arena of His teaching of the 12:

1. Pharisees come from Jerusalem; ask Jesus why he does not respect the old ways---the concern is word that His disciples do not wash their hands ritually when they eat; Jesus teaches that it is not what we eat that counts, but what comes out of the heart. A new teaching to the orthodox of the first covenant who thought they were the LORD'S chosen;
2. A Canaanite woman, pagan by Jewish standards, seeks a healing for her daughter. Disciples challenge Jesus since they think they are the ones in charge, but the woman's faith marks a new beginning that salvation will include ALL PEOPLE;
3. Jesus evokes the confession from Peter that Jesus is MESSIAH. Then, He teaches the meaning of that confession is that He will not reign as earthly king/power, but will suffer and die. Peter corrects him and Jesus tells the disciples to keep following, take up their cross and trust His words;
4. Jesus is transfigured as Peter, James, and John hear the words from heaven that "This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him."
5. Jesus predicts His death on the Cross a second time. Matthew records that the disciples "were deeply depressed."
6. The disciples ask him who is the greatest person in the kingdom of heaven and Jesus says the one who is humble like the child He had set in the middle of them;
7. He speaks of the danger of conflict without reconciliation as if preparing the disciples for the reality that they will not always agree and may have different answers to the questions that will challenge them and become an opportunity to renewal in mission;

8. Peter asks how many times one must forgive, 7? Jesus says, "77." There must be no limit to forgiveness under the sign of the Cross.
9. He teaches about the integrity of marriage, blesses the children, calls a rich young man to faith, but the rich man leaves unwilling to walk into new life in Christ; He teaches that unless you give up your stuff/wealth of things you can't get into the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus hears Peter ask, "Lord, wait, we have left everything, what will we get?" His response, "Status is the not key, entitlement is not the reward, and "Many who are firsts now will end up last, and last first."

It is clear that Matthew is guiding the church that first received his Gospel and all that heard it from that day forward are called to do business and life within the parameters of His call. Peter may not have been bragging, but commended that the 12 was the best example.

So, once again, Jesus tells a story...a parable and parables have but one main point. Watch for it!

"The kingdom of heaven is like...."

- ✠ A landlord who goes out to seek hired workers. Could be so in any time or place---even here in our time;
- ✠ He went out several times to hire. Early...9 o'clock...noon...5 o'clock...evening; each was promised "the usual daily wage." A denarius.

1. "I have work for you." Means "called." Jesus calls His disciples to be workers in the kingdom of heaven. Each has work to do, each a promise of salvation (full pay) at the end of the day.
2. "I've been working." Doing the work in the vineyard to which called, following along the missional pathway to the harvest. Huge crops, generous sowing, good caring, lots of work, end of the day, evening. Owner gathers them. Five o'clockers get day's wage. Each of the hires paid equally. The first-ers got the same. And said, "But, this isn't fair!" Most of us would say the same thing, a unison grumbling!
3. "Pay Day☺. At the end of the day, compensation is in the hand of the one who owns the vineyard...who gives as promised to all. Generous and merciful to a fault. And whose words again: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last. And, dare we say it? BUT, THIS IS NOT FAIR!

I believe that this is a story about humility in witness and in service. It is written around 70 AD/CE. There have been in every age those who believed they deserved more because they had been there first: Pharisees were not sure of Jesus, Jesus' own were not sure of the woman from another culture, charter members are not sure of newer members, and newer members are not sure of visitors; cradle Lutherans not sure of former Baptists or non-observants. And before long no one is included in or invited into the circle of grace. Sound familiar in our times!?

The parables call is to humble living in community. A fair warning bracketed by the "first last, last first" insight; a way of responding to those who live into entitlement ("Gave up, tithe, more, was here first"); a fundamental affirmation of the utter generosity of God; Jesus' warning for disciples not to boast when they compare themselves to others.

This is the one point: Sheer grace crosses every human boundary to mark sinners, redeemed; redeemed to serve and to every challenge, every dark moment, fear-filled place of utter anxiety with the promise that all are included into the circle of grace and the new life in Christ.

We are a people living under the legacy of the Reformers. And one of them wrote this about the heart of our parable: The heart of this parable is indeed "that God does not want to deal with us according to work, according to our deserving, but according to grace." (Luther) Which is to say, "God's Riches at Christ's Expense."

Here, then, is the foundation of our life together: The Word. Where is your Bible today? Where will it be tomorrow? The Font of Holy Baptism. You are signed by the Cross, where will you be led to witness in the next days. Holy Communion, the “communion of saints” where we are fed for the journey by the Christ who says “Do this to remember me” and remember whose you are forever!

Yes, it is on the walls---gathered, encouraged, equipped, sent to live a life “worthy of the gospel of Christ”...standing firm, striving side by side, one mind for the faith of the gospel...on the pathways of life that God sets before us in mission Amen!