

**“T’AINT FAIR”**

**Matthew 20:1-16**

**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

**September 24, 2017**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**It is very tempting this morning,**

**to make this the shortest sermon on record.**

**I could simply say:**

**God said, “It’s my kingdom – my rules – get over it!”**

**But I think you deserve more than that**

**and God has a bit more to say about how to apply that**

**to our daily lives.**

**First of all, this is a “universal” parable –**

**we are included in the message and meaning of it**

**God owns the vineyard**

**And we are all workers in it.**

**Because we each have a part to play in this parable,**

**we see it through the eyes of justice and fairness.**

**And this story is not fair.**

**Now, we might agree**

**that the owner of the vineyard can run his business**

**any way he wants,**

**but his compensation policies are really messed up.**

**What seems fair and just to us -**

**if the master of the vineyard is determined to be generous,**

**why not pay those people who worked all day a bonus?**

**PRINCIPLE OF WORKS:**

**The major reason this parable seems unfair to us**

**is because of the “Principle of Works.”**

**Our parents taught us that hard work pays off in the end.**

**We, in turn, taught that to our children**

**and hopefully our children will pass that along.**

**The principle works like this:**

**you work for what you want.**

**You earn what you get.**

**You deserve it.**

**Page 3, paragraph 7 of our employment contract clearly states it.**

**We see this principle lived out everywhere there is capitalism.**

**Salary and wages are judged by comparison to others.**

**Contracts are evaluated comparative terms –**

**based on what someone else is making.**

**No place is that more obvious**

**than with professional athletes and public entertainers.**

**The reference point of new player contracts**

**is always the last free agent who was hired,**

**or the last bonus that was awarded.**

**If so-and-so gets this much,**

**and I accomplished more than she did,**

**then I should get more.**

**The whole situation promotes greed and envy.**

**Here's what it looked like in the parable for today.**

**The first group of workers in the vineyard**

**received exactly what was promised.**

**But they resented receiving the same wage as the last group.**

**Their attitude was similar to that of the Pharisees,  
who were bent out of shape at Jesus' teaching  
that others could inherit a heavenly kingdom  
they thought was reserved for them alone.  
They despised Jesus for offering the kingdom to poor,  
oppressed, weak sinners whom Jesus made equal to them.**

**You see, we operate daily on a system of works and merit.  
And that understanding spills over into this parable  
and we want to side with the first workers  
and judge the actions of the owner as unfair!**

**And that, my brothers and sisters, is where we go astray!**

**When it comes to the Kingdom of Heaven,  
We no longer operate according to the principle of works.  
Now we are operating in the realm of generosity!**

**Because of the sovereignty of God,  
God is not constrained to any obligation,  
Nothing could ever place God in our debt.**

**Nothing has made God accountable to act a certain way.**

**That's the meaning of God's sovereignty,  
so well expressed in the words of the parable,  
"Am I not allowed to do what I choose  
with what belongs to me."**

**So, here's the point:**

**If we recognize this is a parable about the Kingdom of God  
then the meaning cannot rest upon or be judged  
on a principle of what is earned; wages.  
Period.**

**PRINCIPLE OF GRACE:**

**Just as the landowner has a right to do  
whatever he wishes with his own money,  
God also has the exclusive right to have mercy  
on whomever He will have mercy.**

**And now, we begin the dance with predestination.**

**One of the characteristic beliefs of the Presbyterian church.**

**First of all, notice that the owner went searching for people.  
They didn't come looking for work.**

**And when he found people, he invited them in-  
promising them something they wanted  
but had never yet been offered.**

**Let me repeat that because it is very important:**

**They didn't go looking for him.**

**He came looking for them...**

**...like a shepherd searching for a lost sheep...**

**...or a woman searching for a lost coin.**

**If the owner of the vineyard**

**hadn't come to the marketplace that day—**

**not one of them would have worked.**

**None of them would have been paid anything.**

**They all would have been in the same boat.**

**But now, the ones he found first are mad.**

**And they aren't so much mad at the other workers;**

**they are mad at the vineyard owner!**

**They are mad at his generosity.**

**“These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us...”**

**The landowner,**

**whose decision to pay all the workers the same**

**was an act of mercy—not injustice—represents God,  
whose grace and mercy are shed abundantly**

**upon those of God’s choosing.**

**Are you beginning to see how this is a parable about predestination?**

**If we believe in the sovereignty of God –**

**that God is free to do whatever God chooses to do –**

**then it only follows that God’s grace must also be free –  
freely given – or not – to whomever God chooses.**

**One way of looking at this is**

**It is only when the “NO” to all human claims is heard  
that the “YES” of God can be understood.**

**Let me repeat that – it is a very important principle.**

**It is only when the “NO” to all human claims is heard  
that the “YES” of God can be understood.**

**God's gift of mercy is bestowed upon us  
not because of anything we did or didn't do –  
What is given and received depends solely on God's grace.**

**And that is especially true of our salvation!**

**God's sovereignty is not a sovereignty that looks like fatalism,  
impersonal and arbitrary in unfairness.**

**God's sovereignty does not refer to causing harm  
to those who deserve good.**

**But rather, the generosity of God's sovereignty  
focuses on God's willingness to do good  
to those who deserve harm!**

**That's the point,  
God's generosity is shown in God's willing to love those  
who deserve and have earned God's wrath and justice.**

**And just because that's hard to hear – and understand –  
does not make it any less true.**



**There is no room in this discussion for human pride,  
since the only choice any of us have  
is either to answer the call of God when it comes  
or to stand idle and waste our lives altogether.**

**CONCLUSION:**

**The kingdom of heaven isn't about rewards.**

**We don't serve God so that He will love us more.**

**We don't serve others because we think it will give us  
a higher rung on the ladder of heaven.**

**We serve God and others because it is a privilege to do so.**

**We serve God and others**

**because working for God's Kingdom is a gift in itself.**

**We serve God as a response to the grace we received.**

**God found all of us standing around in the marketplace**

**with nothing to do –**

**lost and without purpose.**

**That's where I was before I heard God's call.**

**God calls us because God loves each and every one of us  
deeply and profoundly beyond human comprehension.**

**God calls us because God created us in His image  
to be in relationship with Him.**

**God calls us because God's generosity  
is beyond our wildest imaginations.**

**God gives us purpose,  
responding to God's grace with loving works  
not because He needs us...but because He loves us.  
And our response is clearly seen in our works.**

**And there is nothing any of us can do  
to deserve God's generosity and love!!!**

**God made a choice.**

**God made a decision.**

**It was His decision to make.**

**In terms of the parable,**

**it was his vineyard.**

**It is his kingdom.**

**None of us have a claim upon that kingdom,**

**In other words, God says:**

**My kingdom - my vineyard - my rules.**

**And I thank God that we are included in that boundless love!**

**PRAYER:**

**Loving God, when we are presented with decisions that are difficult to make, lead us towards grace rather than towards justice. For You have shown us the grace and mercy we need rather than the justice we deserve.**