

SERMON Sunday September 24 Pentecost 17

Matt 20:16 16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

You know I think most of us parents have a sadistic streak.

We give three kids, three equal size glasses, and 1 bottle of drink and ask one of the kids to share it out.

It's nasty – it's bloody - it's violent – it's cruel.

We've all been there - screams of pain – shouts of "not fair, not fair", as inevitably one gets a single millimeter more than the other.

But we do it – it's like we went through it – so they should have to go through it.

Recently I saw an old couple sit down to lunch at Macca's.

I noticed that they ordered only meal, and an extra drink cup.

I saw that the old man carefully cut the hamburger in half, then then counted out the chips, one for him, one for her, until each had half of them.

Then he poured half of the soft drink into the extra cup and gave it to his wife.

Then the old man then began to eat, and his wife sat watching, with her hands folded in her lap.

I thought this is just too much – I offered to buy them another meal so that they wouldn't have to share just one burger.

The old man looked up and said, "Oh no. We've been married 50 years, and we have always shared everything, 50/50."

So I asked then why then is his wife not eating her half.

The old Man simply said it is my turn with the teeth today.

We're just not good and sharing and working out what is fair.

Often we look at this parable as kids - we focus on what is unfair from a human point of view. One bloke works all day for the same pay as the one who worked only an hour.

It doesn't seem fair.

We say that this world, this kingdom, doesn't work like that – it's not fair!

You should get paid according to what you do.

The thing is that Jesus begins the Parable by saying the "Kingdom of Heaven" is like a landowner.....

This is not about this kingdom on earth – it's about the kingdom of heaven.

There are no work place agreements or unions in heaven.

This how God does it – and it's not fair.

God's grace is for the most undeserving people on earth – even you and me.

He gives to robber on the cross exactly the same as he gives to me and you.

All this talk about who worked the most means nothing.

Clearly this story tells us that the amount of work we do has nothing to do with salvation.

Salvation depends on the grace of God – and we know that grace - we see it in Jesus dying on the cross for you and me.

God gives unfair love or underserved love to all.

Those who miss out are those who actively and consistently reject God's grace.

Isn't it strange how we – God's people that – find it so hard to accept salvation by grace alone.

We like to pay for things – it puts us in control.

How many of us are like Jonah (in the first reading). He didn't want to go to the Nineveh (also known as the city of blood) because he knew they might hear God's word and change and be saved.

It wasn't fair - They didn't deserve it - he thought.

I've been faithful all my life and here they can get saved without lifting a finger.

Do we want Ninevites in the Kingdom – maybe – but surely, they have to do something first?

We are God's people – his ambassadors and it is just too obvious that God's grace is for all – but today we are reminded of underserved love – grace because simply forget.

This is about God's kingdom.

Can't we see the 1 denarius – the agreed price – the same given to all is Jesus life on the cross. The once and for all sacrifice for all people.

Can't we see that we are all precious.

Jesus is the agreed price paid for our salvation.

Who are we to be Jonah's?

Who are we to deny God's grace to anyone?

Our call is to reveal God's grace to all people.

Can I ask that this week as we do our work – which is God's work in this world - ask your self is there a bit of Jonah in me.

- Am I working to please God – or to thank God?
- Is there someone I really can't be bothered with?
- Are the people who I feel shouldn't be in the Kingdom of God?

You know the last verse of this parable has worried many people:...*the last will be first, and the first last.*"

But if we look at the verse just before this parable it is the same but the other way around: *The first shall be last and the last shall be first.*

It doesn't matter which way you say it – it still means the same.

Aren't they saying that grace is the great leveler?

There is no first or last in the God's kingdom

- no outsider or insider
- no more rightfully deserving or less rightfully deserving
- no better or worse.

Whenever one stands in the kingdom of heaven one thing alone is clear . . .

- It's God's kingdom
- It's God who has made us his children and heirs through faith and baptism.
- It's a place promised and inherited and never earned.

Grace is clear here – but is it just a story? Where do we go from here?

A well-known theologian Karl Bart once said:

[“Grace must find expression in life, otherwise it is not grace at all.”](#)

In other words this needs to be more than a good story – more than just a teaching on grace – *Grace needs to find expression in life.*

We are called to be “unfair” and share God's love and grace with the Ninevites – with people just like us who don't deserve Grace.

We are called – to express grace – less it not be grace.

We are in the business of nonsense.

It makes no-sense at all that God blesses us with grace, that is underserved love, when we know we don't deserve it.

It makes perfect sense that we deal with love that is deserved – but that is not around here – name anyone who deserves Jesus to dies for them.

We deal in grace – just as the father deals in grace – giving freely God's love to those who do not deserve it. Amen.