

PENTECOST 16 YEAR A
JONAH 3:10-4:11
PHILIPPIANS 1:21-30
MATTHEW 20:1-16
SEPTEMBER 23, 24, 2017

The Bible and the teachings of Jesus don't always meet with our approval. They don't seem to be right especially in the way many of us think of the practice of our American work force. In our society those that have more experience receive a higher wage. Those with more education make more than those that have less education. Those that work full time make more than those that work part time. Those that work 40 hours a week take home more pay than those that work 32 hours a week. That is the way things work for us. We have come to accept that this is the way our society works and most of us would agree this is proper.

The other day I heard a discussion about professional athletes and their yearly salaries. You might expect that each athlete in a particular sport should make the same amount as every other player in that sport. Anthony Rizzo, Clayton Kershaw and Justin Verlander should make the same amount for playing the same game. Two of these are pitchers and the other plays first base. Most of us would say that players are paid based on their abilities to play the game. When the athletes negotiate their contracts, they look at what others are making and they seek a higher salary than the others even when they play the same game and the same position.

In the church pastors of larger congregations often make more in salary than pastors in smaller churches. Pastors with more years in the ministry make a larger salary than pastors just starting out. I certainly don't want to make less in salary than I do now but am I more valuable to the Lord than Pastor Lynn?

Matthew 20:1, 2 “For 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

What is the kingdom of heaven like? Jesus taught using parables as he sought to teach about the kingdom of heaven. Last week we looked at the parable of the unforgiving servant and God's unlimited grace and mercy. God forgives and then requires that we also forgive our brothers and sisters. The kingdom of heaven is about mercy and grace. It is about God giving us the gift of eternal life. In the parable of the laborers Jesus told about the way workers might be hired but the main point of our Lord's teaching might have caused them to take issue. It was often the practice of landowners to hire day labor. In this story the landowner went out early in the morning to hire workers. He promised to pay the usual daily wage. The usual daily wage was not an extravagant amount of money but a wage that would allow a person to provide for his needs and that of his family for one day. Those hired at the beginning of the day were promised the usual daily wage. They agreed with the terms and went into the vineyard to work. As we read in Matthew 20, the landowner went at other times of the day as well to hire workers. The landowner saw the need for others to be hired to complete the work required for that day. Each worker was offered to be paid what was fair.

If we did not know the story, we might expect that those working less hours would be paid according to hours worked. They would receive a fraction of the daily wage. That would seem fair and few would complain about the amount received. Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven. What does the Kingdom of heaven look like? Who is there and who will be there? Is it a spiritual place? Is it something that will come in another age, but not now? It might be argued that Jesus didn't come to establish the church, but to draw us near to the kingdom of God. Jesus often speaks about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. He wants us to know about the kingdom but he also wants us to know about our relationship with others in the church and outside of the church.

Matthew 20:10-12 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, '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.'

We can understand why those hired first were grumbling against the landowner. We might grumble too. The more you work the more you should be paid. Jesus shares this story about wages but I think he is talking about our lives as God's people and about our lives in Christ. How often do we grumble because others Christians seem to be further ahead than we are? Do we grumble because someone made a deathbed conversion? Would you be angry if they were in heaven when you get there?

The landowner paid each worker the same amount regardless of how much time was spent in the vineyard. Our Lord does the same for you and me as we are in the church. The gift of God is given no matter how long we have been Christians or Lutherans. It is given even to those that are not Scandinavian or German. The gift of the kingdom is for any that walk in faith believing the promises of God.

Matthew 20:15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

The landowner responded to the grumbling workers with a question about jealousy and generosity. "Are you envious because I am generous?" How do we respond to this question from our Lord? The truth is that God has already given us good gifts and has already blessed us with the gift of life. We are invited to enjoy the life the Lord gives but then to share that life. As we face the Kingdom of heaven we become aware that things might not be as we would expect. The blessings of the kingdom are achieved by the things we do. The kingdom comes to us apart from our own strength and understanding but as a gift of God's grace freely given. As the landowner gives the day's pay to all he

hires no matter how long each worked, so God gives the blessing of the kingdom apart from our good works. The way of the world is that the one who works the longest receives the most pay. The one with the most education makes the most money. The one with the greatest ability is paid more and the one with more work experience is paid according to years on the job. That is just and fair in our society. In the kingdom of God the principles of merit and ability are set aside so that grace will prevail.

We rejoice in the blessings of God and we rejoice with that come into the kingdom of Heaven. AMEN