

A Generous God

Parables of Jesus: Part 2 “A Generous God”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 22, 2021

13th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Matthew 20:1-16

Reflection: Psalm 145

Greeting: Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

Prayer: Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 145

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever. (Psalm 145:8-21 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 145 and we hear of God’s generous love. We hear of God helping those who are in need. A God who provides for his people. Whose faithfulness is with those that seek him. That God’s generous love is there for us. That the Lord is always nearby. How does it make you feel that God is always close by? Does Christ’s generosity inspire you to be generous? Do you allow God’s love to overflow in you so that you may love others? How do you share in the hope of God’s steadfast love and faithfulness?

Prayer: O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to be generous just as you have been generous in your great love for us. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus' name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 20 verses 1 through 16.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After he agreed with the workers to pay them a denarion, he sent them into his vineyard. “Then he went out around nine in the morning and saw others standing around the marketplace doing nothing. He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I’ll pay you whatever is right.’ And they went. “Again around noon and then at three in the afternoon, he did the same thing. Around five in the afternoon he went and found others standing around, and he said to them, ‘Why are you just standing around here doing nothing all day long?’ ““Because nobody has hired us,’ they replied. “He responded, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and give them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on finally to the first.’ When those who were hired at five in the afternoon came, each one received a denarion. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarion. When they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ‘These who were hired last worked one hour, and they received the same pay as we did even though we had to work the whole day in the hot sun.’ “But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn’t I agree to pay you a denarion? Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the same as I give to you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I’m generous?’ So those who are last will be first. And those who are first will be last.” (Matthew 13:1-23 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

In today’s message, we look to another parable. We begin with a landowner looking for workers. He’s going out early. And he looks for workers. He agrees to pay them a denarion, which is a typical day’s wages. They agree to the pay, and they get to work. Later on, about nine in the morning, the landowner goes out again. He sees people standing around doing nothing. He goes to them and offers them a job too. “Go, get in my vineyard. I’ll pay you whatever is right.” And so, they go. The scene is then repeated at noon. And then again, at three in the afternoon. Landowner goes out, sees people with nothing to do, and says “hey, go work in my vineyard, I’ll pay you whatever is right.” And he keeps collecting workers for the vineyard. Then at about five in the afternoon, he finds yet more people standing around, waiting. He asks, “What are you doing just standing here all day long?” The answer is simple.

“Nobody’s hired us. We have nowhere to be.” So we get the landowner’s response. “Go to the vineyard. I’ll hire you.” So far so good. We have someone out looking for those who are looking for work. And he gives them a job.

Now, when evening comes, the owner has a talk with his manager. Tells him to get all the workers together and start paying them. But he wants him to start with the people that were hired last and move back through the day until the people that were hired first thing in the morning. First, we have the people who came at five in the afternoon, and they come up for their wages. And what do they get? They receive a full day’s wages, a denarion. Everybody gets paid. Those who came at five, those who came at three, those who came at noon, those who came at nine, and then come the people who were hired first thing in the morning. They’ve got it in their heads that they’re going to get more. Each of them gets, you guessed it, a denarion. This doesn’t sit well. Grumbling and complaining begins. “Why is it these guys who are hired so late in the day work one hour, and they get the same pay that we did for working the whole day in the hot sun?” Does that seem fair? Does that seem right? These guys have been out there all day working and they get one denarion. Same thing those guys were out there working an hour for. They’ve been robbed. Or have they? The owner replies, “Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn’t I agree to pay you a denarion? When we first sat down this morning, I said I’ll pay you this much to come to work and you said that’s fine. Take what’s yours and go. What is it to you that I want to give to somebody else the same as what I gave to you? Isn’t that my right?” And here’s the stinger. “Are you resentful because I’m generous?” Now there’s a wakeup call. “Are you resentful because I’m generous?” Those people who worked from the first part of the morning thought everything was fine when they first came in that day. Everything was peachy, they were going to get a day’s wages for a day’s work. It’s all good. It’s not until somebody else gets more than they think they deserve, that there’s a problem at all. They’re upset someone decided to be generous to those who didn’t get hired first.

That’s an interesting concept to take in. Being upset that someone else decided to be generous. So, what is this really about? Today’s parable doesn’t relate to how to run a profitable business. It isn’t about how you should run a vineyard. It reflects God’s generosity through grace. As I read it, those who come to serve early are not greater than those who come to serve late. It’s like thinking that you’ve been a devoted Christian since you’ve been able to read. Since being a child, you have followed Jesus. You have prayed. You have come to church. You have shown up and served Christ. And then someone shows up to church. An old man late in his years shows up. And finally hears the call. He prays. And he comes to church. And he believes. Now he’s saved. But he’s just received the same salvation that you have. All these years it’s been fine. But now, this guy shows up and expects God’s grace to be extended to him in the same way it is extend it to you. To receive the same amount of love you do. What about all those years he was missing out? Surely there’s got to be more in store because you’ve spent your whole life here. Right? Right?

But that's the thing. God's love isn't tied to how long we've been saved. God's grace isn't tied to how many Sundays we've been sitting in the pew. God's mercy doesn't vary depending on how long you've sought it. Christ is there for each and every one of us. There isn't a finite amount of salvation going around. Because God is generous. God is merciful. Christ didn't die more for some than he did for others, Christ died for all that all could be forgiven, that all could be saved. And we may not always get the call at the same time. We may not always respond at the same time of life. But the important thing is that we do respond. The point isn't to be jealous of those who come late to the game. Should we fault Christ for being generous in his love? It sounds kind of silly when we put it like that. Christ shows us generosity so that we can be generous. If you've served longer, it just means you have that much more to share!

I'm reminded again of when I was in Chicago with my kids and how Simon wanted to give to everyone that he saw that was asking for help. But the reason that it comes to me now, isn't so much so much his act of giving. I mean, I will always be moved by a seven-year-old who believes that helping others is simply the right thing to do. But it was his faith and his hope in my generosity that struck me now. That every time he saw somebody, he wanted to give. And it was never about how much he could give, but that he could give. And he always turned to me to be able to give. He had complete faith in me that I would be generous with him so that he could be generous to others. Let that picture settle in. His faith was in a father who would be generous with him because of love. His trust was in a father who would not look away from him because of his own generosity. Isn't that how we should be? Trusting in God to allow us to be generous? Trusting in God's love so that we can be generous in love? Simon turned to me the same way that we should turn to God so that we can give. We rely on God's steadfast love, that love that endures forever. We rely upon God's infinite grace. Simon wasn't thinking about how much he could give, but that he could give. And that he had faith that he would find a way to give.

In the same way we must look to Christ, not as to how much we give or how much each is deserving. But that we can give our love because there will always be enough love to go around. We can show grace because we have been shown grace. There will always be enough love for you, no matter how much love is shown to anyone else. God has enough love to be able to love you and to love everyone else. To show grace and mercy. Salvation is there for all. Whether we're hired at the crack of dawn or at the beginning of the evening. God's love is there for all, and God is generous enough to open salvation to all. There's enough love for us to keep giving it and never run out. God's endless generosity becomes our endless generosity. In the hands of our Heavenly Father, there will always be enough love for all.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

August 29th – *Thoughts on Forgiveness* – Matthew 18:21-35

We have a parable that can teach us lessons about the importance of forgiveness, both in how we forgive and are forgiven, and how those two are linked.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds	Ronnie Winstead
Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Charlie Henderson
Rosalee Chancellor	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland
Family of Terri Kemper	Darrell Quick	Shelley Murphy	Jeff Davidson
Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt	Family of Harold Moss	Allen Goebel & Family
Jodie Bunch	George Waggle	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite
Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Family of Mark Fulton
Family of George Reisner	Kathy Roberts		

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