

**ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)  
SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2020  
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (YEAR A)**

**READINGS: (JONAH 3:10-4; 11) EXODUS 16:2-15 //PSALM 105:1-6, 37-45//PHILLIPIANS 1:21-30// MATTHEW 20:1-16**

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*Dear God, I am asking that your grace and mercy would continue to follow us all the days of our lives, as you have promised in Your Word. Teach us to understand your ways and grant us wisdom I pray, to live our lives in a way that is pleasing and honouring to you.*

**Heaven's Entrance Exam:** A man died and went to heaven. St. Peter met him at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter said, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in." "Okay," the man said. "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, not even in my heart." "That's wonderful," said St. Peter. "That's worth three points!" "Three points?" said the man. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithes and service." "Terrific!" said St. Peter. "That's certainly worth a point." "One point?!! Well, I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans." "Fantastic, that's good for two more points," said Peter. "Two points!" the man cried. "At this rate the only way I'll get into heaven is by the grace of God." "Bingo, 100 points! Come on in."

This brings me to our theme for this morning **GOD'S GRACE**

*So let turn and reflect on the parable in our Gospel reading*

A landowner needed to hire day labourers to work in his fields, and so he went to the labour pool (market place) and hired a number of workers. He agreed to pay these first group of workers the standard wage – a denarius a day. (R52 a day). But then he needed more help, and so he made several more trips to the labour pool (market place), hiring additional workers. But to these workers, he gave no specific commitment. He did not tell them what he would pay, only that “**I will pay you whatever is right.**” Chapter 20 v 4. The last group of workers was hired one hour before the workday ended.

In those days, the workers were paid for their labours at the end of the workday. When it came time to pay, the landowner began with those workers who had laboured for only an hour.

*I want you to notice that this is actually unusual because the normal practice is that those who came to work first must be paid first, and secondly they got the same.*

Everyone was amazed when they saw that these workers were given a full day's pay, for only one hour's work. You can imagine how the rest of the workers began to reason to themselves and calculated. If they get one denarius, the ones who worked two hours must be getting paid twice the daily rate, and the ones who worked all day must be getting eight denarius.

However this did not happen everyone was paid the same wage a denarius. And you would agree with me in today's standard this is not fair that I get the same as the one who worked less than me.

And that is exactly how the workers who worked for almost 12 hours felt , this was unfair and they started grumbling but the landowner answered them didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ***Don't I have the right to do what I want with my money or are you envious because I am generous?***

So at first glance it seems that this parable is about **wages** but my brothers and sisters the wages at stake (even at the moment of Jesus' first telling of the parable) are not actual daily wages for vineyard-labourers, but it is about ***forgiveness, life, and salvation for believers—it's about GRACE.***

So what is Grace? Grace is God's unmerited favour and mercy and compassion towards us. It is God, stooping down to us in His kindness to reach us in our need, and convey upon us a benefit. It is unmerited which means we do not deserve or earn it, but yet God give it to us.

It is important to notice that this parable of ***the workers in the vineyard*** follows the statement in Matthew 19v30. And it reads as follows: **"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."** And at the end of this parable in Matthew 20:16 we read **"So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen,"** (20v16).

The statement in Matthew 19v 30 is part of the Lord's response to Peter's question, ***"...we have left all and followed you. Therefore what shall we have?"*** Jesus

assured him of the privilege of following him means. In Matthew 19v 28 we read *“You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”*, And Jesus also spoke of the abundant blessings for "everyone" who follows Him. V 29 *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.*

Then comes the statement: **"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."** Jesus wants Peter and the other disciples to know, reward in the kingdom (both immediate and ultimate) is not dispensed according to seniority or time in service. The apostles had been with Jesus from the beginning of His work (Acts 1:21-22). And while they had a special work or role not shared by all kingdom citizens, still, reward in the kingdom is not based on how long you have served. It is based on the **GRACE OF GOD** (*God's unmerited favour on us*), and the quality, depth and perseverance of our response to His *grace*.

We are sometimes like these angry entitled labourers who are more concerned about their rank than anything else. The angry entitled labourers felt they outranked those who had only worked for an hour, and were furious with the idea of being viewed as equal by the landowner. They were preoccupied with rank and opposed to grace. Sometimes it is the same with us. We too can be preoccupied with rank (*I am the reverend I am the lay minister I know the Lord, I have been in this Church so many years, I have given my heart to Jesus 20/30 years ago*) and opposed to God's grace. But the truth is that in God's eyes we are all sinners in need of grace; no one outranks anyone else. We are all in the same boat.

We have a tendency, as the parable illustrates, to be resentful of what others receive from God. We think they are less worthy, or later arrivals, or just plain worse sinners. They are the outcast and they don't deserve the same as we get. The owner of the vineyard asks those who have worked longest and (presumably) hardest for him, *"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"*

The point is that **God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness** are God's to give away as God sees fit.

*Our Old Testament reading is the well-known story about Jonah who was sent to Nineveh by God to preach against its wickedness and we know at first Jonah refused but after his ordeal in the belly of the fish but later went and preached to the people of Nineveh and the people of Nineveh turned from their evil ways and*

*God had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened But in Jonah chapter 4 v 1 we read Jonah was greatly displeased and become angry towards God when God changed his mind and did not punish the people of Nineveh as he said he would do because they have changed from their wicked behaviour.*

*And Jonah said I knew you are a loving and merciful God always patient always kind and always ready to change your mind and not punish.*

## **CONCLUSION**

My brothers and sisters if we start asking ourselves who deserves to be forgiven, we soon find out that the answer is no one. No matter how hard we work, we can't be "good enough." The good news of the Gospel is that what can't be obtained by good works, Christ gives to us as a gift of **GRACE**.

It is only by **GRACE** that you and I can be saved, and this **GRACE** is available only in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ made on the cross of Calvary, where He took the sin, the guilt, and the punishment for lost sinners.

God forgives us and frees us from the mistakes of the past. We are all put on a new and level horizon. No one is higher than anyone else. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

My dear friends we are all equal we are all sinners saved by **GRACE**

So if you are sitting here this morning thinking I am the worst sinner and I am not worthy, God is saying to you are saved by my Grace just trust and believe and surrender yourself and allow God to work in you.

**SING THE HYMN AMAZING GRACE**