

Jonah 3:10 – 4:11
Psalm 145:1-8
Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-16

Sermon September 24th, 2023

The Generosity of God!

In our gospel, one of the most controversial parables Jesus shares with us rears its ugly head. At face value, this parable can be interpreted in a way that has us see God as one who treats us unfairly. Why does someone who only works an hour of the day get the same paycheck as someone who works a full day? This definitely isn't what we were taught growing up. My parents, my grandparents, my teachers, the movies I saw, the stories I read taught me this same principle: If I work really hard, I will be rewarded (**Image One**: someone working really hard). If I don't work really hard, I will face consequences

Of course, when we enter the workforce, we realize rather quickly that this principle doesn't always apply. Sometimes we can work very hard without receiving any affirmation or financial reward. I know people who can barely pay their bills working three or four jobs, because they are not being paid fairly (**Image One**).

Then sometimes people who don't put as much effort into their work get rewarded, because their boss is their uncle or a friend of their parents. Or they are very attractive. There are studies done that show that people with more physical attraction are more successful in life. Or they belong to one of those social groups that is defined as "normal." Therefore, they are rewarded for being part of this social group. Not due to any effort on their part.

But though this principle does not always apply, this principle is instilled in our culture and learning, and when we do come across these experiences, we often get frustrated and mad at how unfair this is for us. Sometimes, rightfully so. As in some of the latter examples I stated.

Unfortunately, this principle also shapes our beliefs and attitudes towards people who live in poverty in negative ways (**Image Two**: someone living in poverty). We perceive them as lazy, as undeserving of our help. In fact, we believe they are getting exactly what they deserve. We think, if they don't want to be poor, just get up and get a job already, or two, or three, or four, depending on what they get paid. I did it, so you can as well.

Instead of trying to understand all the complexities that go into someone finding themselves living in poverty (**Image Two**). Like, their struggles with mental illness, or their physical ailments, or the lack of social supports they receive, or the challenges they face, because of the color of their skin or their sexual orientation or their gender

identity or their immigration status or the social group they belong to. Or all of the above.

When we dive deeper into the parable, we see that the workers that were hired in the last hour didn't have a chance to work beforehand. No one would hire them. I wouldn't be surprised if an Indigenous person or a person of color could relate to these workers when listening to this parable (**Image Three:** an indigenous person). Therefore, hearing this parable in a different way.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who are treated unfairly in our society without any measure of their work ethic. Jesus sees this unfairness, and challenges our perceptions.

Jesus challenges us to see that God is a generous God who meets the needs of the worker who is finally able to find work in the last hour, as well as, the worker who has had the opportunity to work a whole day. The wage both receive helps provide them with what they need to live for that day. Both go home that evening with the capacity to put food on their table.

And so, Jesus challenges our principle with his own principle:

God is a generous God.

God is a God who shows hospitality to all.

God is a God who doesn't measure us based on our own efforts.

God is a God who loves us, because we are God's children. Period.

We see this in our reading of Jonah, when God chooses to show mercy to the people of Nineveh, despite the protest of Johah. Sometimes God welcomes people into God's kingdom that we think are underserving of God's mercy. People we have judged, and rejected.

Throughout the gospels, we see that Jesus is being challenged by the religious authorities for hanging out with people who have been judged, and rejected by the religious community, as well as, the society as a whole. Eventually, Jesus faces death on the cross for standing up for these marginalized communities.

God is a generous God.

God is a God who shows hospitality to all.

God is a God who doesn't measure us based on our own efforts.

God is a God who loves us, because we are God's children. Period.

And as we see in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, God invites us to do the same. To be imitators of Jesus. To be a community that is generous and hospitable not only to people like us, but also, to those who live in poverty (**Image Two**), those who struggle with mental illness, those who belong to groups in our society who are marginalized, mistreated, and rejected (**Image Three**).

God's people are invited to be generous.

God's people are invited to show hospitality to all.

God's people are invited not to judge, but to love one another, because we are all God's children.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for your generosity and hospitality. Turn our hearts to tend to the need of those who are hurting in our city. Help us not to judge, but to live out your generosity and hospitality. In Jesus name we pray, **amen**.

© copyright, 2023, Wallace Bornhuse. All rights reserved.