

Sunday, September 17, 2023 *“Faithful and Fair”*

***Philippians 1:21-30 Matthew 20: 1-16***

We continue to live into the 3 C's for Glenwood Church for this year: This is where as a community of faith, we make connections with one another and share Christ's message of Love we also continue to learn what it means to do so through Jesus' teachings. Last week we heard how important it is to forgive- not to seek revenge but to seek forgiveness and offer forgiveness to others. This is one of those teachings deemed foundational to our faith growth in Jesus.

But in this world today do we really think fairness has a role to play? Is it fair that some people work diligently all their life and receive little in pensions or benefits? Or others unable to fully physically give of themselves are able to receive more support? What about those families where opportunities are limited or not offered and yet the ability and willingness is there? Just what is fair in today's world?

Maybe we can take one example of the unfairness of the world== food distribution. Seven Billion people live in our world today but for many people have one meal per day is a luxury; two is meagre and three is unheard of. And yet the world's farmers produce more than enough food for all to live healthy lives. So what is happening seems unfair, doesn't? Why can't we just share food equally? This seems as simple as splitting what is available to all but the problem is that there is more than the actual food that is shared or offered or traded. There is money, political power and overall leadership between those in need and those who have. Fairness is not really lifted up in trading commodities or food nor is it a consideration when what is traded is not really traded- but bought and sold for a profitable price.

Just what is fair? In our teaching from Matthew 20 Jesus tells the story of a landowner who needed to hire labourers for the day to work in his vineyard. After getting some workers to come to an agreement about working for the day he sent them out to work. Later that morning, he went back into the marketplace and saw others in need of work, He sent them to work as well. At noon and 3 and 5 o'clock he went to the market place and hired more workers to share in the tasks of the vineyard. So he had workers who started early in the morning and then again at 9, noon, 3 and 5 o'clock.

When the evening came, the owner of the vineyard called his manager to pay the workers. He told them to pay the workers—last hired first paid. Each worker received that same usual daily wage no matter the time they started. When those who had been hired first came to be paid, they thought they would receive more but they only received the daily wage. They grumbled against the landowner and complained. “But these guys only worked one hour and got the same as we who have been in the sun all day. It’s not fair!” But the landowner clarified his reasons: Didn’t you agree to work the full day at the wage I offered? Well this is what belongs to you and it is yours. If I choose to give this last hired person the same as I give to you, it is my choice. Maybe your problem is that you are envious of my generosity? Jesus then states, “The last will be first and the first will be last.”

There seems to be a lot of unfairness in the world right now—or maybe we are hearing complaints since the end of the global pandemic which saw a huge shift of what is fair under specific circumstances. It is not that long ago that people had to stay at home to work as offices work places and service agencies were closed to the public and to people working there. People worked from home. But now people are expected to go into the workplace and what is now being shared is but that’s not fair! I didn’t have to before—I could call email or send what I do in. Now I have to work differently? It’s not fair. But what occurs next is key to today’s work situations. Many companies are now saying – that was then this is now or this is the work you did before and there is a significant change with the ethos of work—that is, what is the value of work.

The landowner knew the cost of labour, knew the value of work and how important it was for those labourers seeking to work for a day’s pay. Maybe he saw something in those whom he hired throughout the day- we don’t know. We are not told of the circumstances as to why day labourers only looked for work at noon- 3 or 5 o’clock? Maybe they had other responsibilities which prohibited them. All we do know is that the landowner saw people who were willing to work and hired them for an agreed upon wage. Maybe the landowner knew some of the people and reached out to help them live with dignity by hiring them for a shorter day just for the day. Maybe just maybe the landowner saw the desperation in the eyes of the ones hired at 5 pm for the ability to buy food for the night. We don’t know all we do know is

that the landowner reached out and offered support through his capacity as a person who could help. Was it fair to the others? Or out of love he acted?

How might we discern what is fair today? Fairness is not just by the wages and benefits one receives but by how gracious one person is in their actions to another. Just think about those moments of grace which you have received- when a stranger showed you kindness— opening doors, paying it forward, offered a hand and help or when you were offered something they needed. But this act of grace must be seen as something worthwhile.

Paul writes to the young church at Philippi about his personal faith and commitment to Jesus and the dilemma he is experiencing as he writes from jail. He is striving to encourage the young churches he has started yet is limited in what he can do because he is in jail. So he writes to them about what he is facing. “For to me, living in Christ, and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer.”

What does fruitful labour mean? Does it involve fair work, fair pay or just being fair in our actions when love is needed. Or more than this? That there is an end result which bears much fruit—tangible responses to the work expended?

Paul’s dilemma is that he is content with living or dying because he believes that no matter what he belongs to Jesus and he will do his best to share his message with others as long as he is able. And this is faith in action. But when he no longer can do this, he will die and be in Christ’s presence this is faith. This he believes is just and good. But we might even ask, is it fair? How can Paul be ok with what he is facing after all he has done to establish new churches? How can he be content to sit in jail and write his letters to the churches? IT just doesn’t seem fair. But Paul knows—his life was transformed and he knows that God is in control. God is the one who called him to serve. And Christ is the one Paul serves with deep faith and trust.

The question we must ask ourselves is do we have faith strong enough to follow Christ or the willingness to grow? Do we understand that what might be perceived as unfair is dependent upon the perspective one has and who makes the decisions? And the question of fairness and faith is in Jesus story. The landowner acted to hire people throughout the day to receive the same wage. We are called to follow at different times and stages in life, yet what

we shall gain is better by far than we can ever imagine. For when we follow and believe in Christ and that he died and rose for our sake, we will live eternally with him. This is what kept Paul travelling and sharing Jesus' story and this is our purpose too as followers of Jesus.

Our hope is in Christ, but we must be willing to tell his story of faith and love and hope. This is foundation to our commitment to Jesus and to how we live and grow together in the body of Christ. It may not always seem fair, but faithfulness to Christ leads us to grow in knowledge and to receive God's grace in new ways. This is our task, this is our hope this is our faith in Jesus.

#### PRAYER

God of love help us to be faithful even in times when fairness eludes us. Help us to know what it is we are called to do. Show us Christ in new ways so that we too will continue to grow. Help us to know what it means to be living Jesus' way each day. We ask in faith and in hope through Jesus. Amen.