**15 Pentecost, Sept.21, 2014; Matthew 20:1-16; Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Today's Gospel is disturbing to us because we like fairness: those who work longer get paid more than those who work less time. Right? Wrong, according to Jesus' parable of the day laborers today. In the story, we hear about the same pay given to those who worked the whole day and those who worked only an hour. **"*It* *isn’t fair*!”** the workers who worked all day protested. And they were right, it is not fair. To us who have been raised to be sensitive about what is fair and what is unfair, this story about the workers in the vineyard all being paid the same amount no matter how long they worked sure seems unfair....and, in addition, just a bad business practice! We like fairness, in fact we expect it. When I was growing up in Milwaukee I remember often standing in front of one or both of my parents with a scowl on my face stamping my foot and saying, "**it's not fair."** I am the fourth of five children, and so often it seemed to me I was forgotten in the busyness of life in our big family; my older and younger siblings always seemed to get more than I did.

So, we can all relate to the laborers who worked all day and said, "***it isn't fair***." Oh yes, we work hard and have a sense of needing things to be fair. So, what is Jesus teaching us here? Is He teaching us not to work hard? No. Rather, Jesus is teaching us about the nature of His love, His grace, His mercy in His Kingdom -- none of these are dependent upon how long or hard we work. **We don't earn God's love. This is shocking, but it is true!** God does not apportion out His love based upon how much work we do or how many good deeds we do. Jesus does not give out His love on the basis of fairness or the basis of our hard work; Jesus goes way beyond fairness. The fact that we don't earn God's love is sure a good thing - because none of us could ever do enough to earn God's love and forgiveness! In the Gospel, Jesus is trying to help us understand that life in His Kingdom is different. We are so used to earning what we have that we struggle to understand what Jesus is teaching here: but Jesus is talking about His free gift of grace and mercy. We are offered abundant life in Christ that we haven't earned. Jesus goes way beyond fairness, and offers us this free gift -- and it is for those of us who will receive it. So, it is really different than we are used to. This does not mean that we are not to work, but it does mean that we need to learn that God's ways are not our ways. We are used to judging each other based upon how much work or contributions we have done, but that is not God's way. God's way is for each of us to concentrate on our relationship with Him, on our receiving His grace/love, and our living into that love as we go through our lives. So, God's way does not include us comparing ourselves with others, or about whether others are worthy or not. Jesus challenges our assumptions, and does this so we can learn the truth about His love....and then pass it on. In our culture, people are ranked and valued by all kinds of criteria -- but that is not God's way. God has given each of us, regardless of our background or race, the chance to reach our potential.....jet propelled by His love. His love is real, and here, and we don't have to earn it.....we just need to receive it and pass it on. We don't deserve it, but it is here as a gift. God's generosity is to be received, appreciated, and shared.....and it is not about who earned it, because we are all undeserving. God's Kingdom is organized differently than we are used to. God's generosity is outrageous. God will do what God will do.

We see, in our Old Testament reading today, the Israelites receiving the outrageous gifts of manna (bread) from heaven, fresh water, and quails (game birds) for the taking. The people had complained - and God gave them these. As our Psalm 105 said today, "***They asked, and quails appeared, and he satisfied them with bread from heaven. He opened the rock, and water flowed***."

Today you have an opportunity to begin to connect more deeply with God. Flowing from God is grace: undeserved, free. Might you wish to connect more deeply with God? If yes, come to our "Practice of Prayer" meeting and class today....just 30 minutes, beginning here in the church at 11:15.

We can’t earn our salvation by anything we do, but God is reaching out to you and is ready to give it away for free to you. Do you want to be a part of what God is doing? Amen.