

**Devotions for the Week of September 17, 2017**  
**North East United Methodist Church**  
**By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

**Sunday, September 17, 2017**

**Read Matthew 20: 1-16.**

Jesus tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard, shocking his listeners, surprising them at the end of the parable with the landowner paying those who came during the last hour the same wage as those who worked all day in the fields. Jesus communicates through this parable that salvation is not any kind of achievement; it cannot be earned by our hard work or our devotion to the Lord. On human terms, entering the kingdom of God is not merely hard, but impossible. It is only by the grace of God that we can enter, that we can be in relationship with our Father in heaven.

The workers hired at 5 p.m., only one hour before the work day ended, were paid the same as those hired at 6 a.m. that morning. Like the vineyard workers, whether we come to Christ, whether we accept His invitation, very early in our lives as children, or late in our lives, near death, we will be given the same gift of eternal life, heaven, citizenship in the family of God.

According to the world, to society, this is unfair. Society teaches that those who work more, get more; but, God's grace goes in opposition to what society teaches. Grace or the unmerited love of God is offered without price. Grace is not about getting what you deserve; it is about getting what you do not deserve. Like the workers hired at the eleventh hour were paid a full-days wage, that which they did not deserve, by the grace of God, we too, are giving a free invitation to walk with God in this life and the next, regardless of where we have been or what age we are now.

*"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound...that saved a wretch like me...I once was lost, but now am found...was blind but now I see."* Amazing. Eugene Peterson once wrote, *"All the persons of faith I know are sinners, doubters, uneven performers. We are secure not because we are sure of ourselves but because we trust that God is sure of us."* It's not about our abilities; it is about God's mercy. It is not about how hard or how long we have worked or been a Christian; it is all about God's love and grace. We have done nothing to deserve such love.

How do you see yourself? Deserving of more? One of the faithful? Or do you see yourself as not good enough, having so much to make up for...to work for? Or do you simply see yourself as a recipient of God's mighty grace and amazing love and therefore, give Him thanks. Ephesians 2:8-9-*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*

Take time tonight to simply thank God in prayer for the many gifts you have been blessed with, and especially to thank God for the gift of grace, for the gift of love, for the invitation to have a relationship with your Father in heaven.

**Monday, September 18 2017**

**Read Matthew 20: 1-16.**

The workers that were hired early in the morning and worked a full day, only to receive the same wages as those who worked an hour, were furious. Upset, they said to the landowner, "These men, have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day." Jesus says that the ones hired early in the day, when they saw what the eleventh-hour hires were paid, assumed they would be paid more than the "denarius" promised. They weren't upset about what they were paid; it is what they had agreed upon. They were upset because someone else got paid as much for less work. They are upset that others were blessed when they were not.

The workers hired early in the morning had entered their job, the vineyard, with a "legal spirit" about them. "Equal pay for equal work." "You get what you work for." "The harder you work the more

you get.” These phrases ran through their persons. This is what they believed and how they saw the world working. The landowner, on the other hand, saw things differently.

As Christians, we often make the same mistake. We believe in the church that those who work the hardest, serve on the most committees, volunteer the most time, are not only the most reverent and faithful, but will also be the most blessed. They are most deserving of God’s many blessings and love. When someone new walks in the door, accepts Christ for the first time late in life, and begins to reach out in small ways, we simply look at them as less-deserving, less-faithful than we are. Or as Christians we make the mistake of judging ourselves harshly, not “good enough.” We work harder and harder in ministry, trying to make up for our past mistakes, trying to earn God’s love, forever under a shackle of guilt.

Counselor, David Seamands, writes, *“Many years ago I was driven to the conclusion that the two major causes of most emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: the failure to understand, receive, and live out God’s unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people...We read, we hear, we believe a good theology of grace. But that’s not the way we live. The good news of the Gospel of grace has not penetrated.”*

We cannot enter the vineyard with a “legal spirit.” We cannot be a Christian serving on committees and in ministries because we feel we have to...we must earn our way. We cannot be the Christian looking down on others because we feel we have earned our way, working years in ministry and volunteering thousands of hours. We do not want to be Christians who focus on ourselves instead of the God that shows us mercy and grace, who gifts each of us with salvation.

Take time tonight to reflect on this parable, to ask God to reveal any “legal spirit” within you and to help you remove it, accepting His grace not only for you but for everyone.

## **Tuesday, September 19, 2017**

### **Read Matthew 20:1-16.**

Note in the parable that Jesus uses the word, “hire.” Jesus says, *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”* What does it mean to be hired? Why did Jesus choose this word?

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon, “Early and Late,” writes, *“I think we may say that there is this likeness between hiring a servant and the engagement of a soul to Christ, that henceforth a man hired has no right to serve another, he serves the master who has hired him. When a soul is called by grace into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, he cries, ‘O Lord, other lords have had dominion over me, but now thee only will I serve.’ He plucks off the yoke of sin, its pleasure...and he puts upon him that yoke of which the Master says it is easy, and he bears that burden which Jesus tells us is light. A hired servant must not work for another, he is not his own master; and ‘ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price’ (I Cor. 6:19-20).”*

I believe Jesus chose His words carefully and the word “hired” here is very important. Jesus often spoke of how we could not choose to serve “two masters,” but we must choose one over the other. When we accept Jesus as Master, allow the master to hire us, to have control of our lives, we cannot serve another. We must “pluck off” those things that would pull us away from Christ, away from the work He is ready to give us; we must “pluck off” those things that will pull our attention away from God.

Are there others in your life that are “pulling” you away from your relationship with God? Are you trying to work for two masters? Are the things of this world causing you to not show up for the commitment you have made with God or to be found “idle” in the marketplace?

Pray that God will show you those areas of your life, people in your life, things in your life that you are attempting to serve alongside serving God? Is God first?

### **Wednesday, September 20, 2017**

#### **Read Luke 23: 26-43.**

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. *“What’s the rumpus about?”* he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, *“Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”*

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, the Muslim code of law – each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity declares God’s love unconditional.

Spurgeon writes, *“God, however, in his abundant mercy can do as he wills to the praise of the glory of his grace, and at the eleventh hour he can call his chosen. It is very late, it is very very, very late, it is sorrowfully late, it is dolefully late, but it is not too late, and if the Master call thee, come – though a hundred years of sin should make thy feet heavy to thee, so that they steps are painfully limping.”*

This is what God did for the thief. Here in his last moments, dying on a cross, a life spent in crime, the thief cried out to Jesus, *“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”*

Michael Yaconelli, in his book, *Messy Spirituality*, writes, *“God’s grace is unfair. How unfair! Shouldn’t the thief have been asked to repent, to make amends, to at least declare he was sorry? No lectures, no sermons, no teaching or demands for repentance, Jesus just ushers the man into the kingdom of God.”*

The thief cries out and Jesus answers, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

This is grace. In the civilized world it doesn’t make any sense, but in the kingdom of God there are countless examples of God’s “unfair love” including the prodigal son, Zaccheus the tax collector, and the woman caught in adultery.

Helmut Thielicke wrote, *“Jesus was able to do this only because he saw through the filth and crust of degeneration, because his eye caught the divine original which is hidden in every person...He saw in him an earring child of God...He saw in him a human being whom His Father loved and grieved over because he was going wrong...He saw him as God originally designed and meant him to be...Jesus did not identify the person with his sin, but rather saw in this sin something alien, something that really did not belong to him, something that merely chained and mastered him and from which he would free him and bring him back to his real self.”*

Let us give thanks that God’s grace, God’s “unfair love,” God’s amazing love, extends to you and me. May we accept this great gift and live a life giving back, telling others of God’s love. And may we celebrate and not complain like the workers hired early in the morning, when God’s grace extends to someone we might consider less-deserving.

### **Thursday, September 21, 2017**

#### **Read 2 Samuel 11 & 12: 1-15.**

Take time to read the story of David and Bathsheba. David lusted after Bathsheba, slept with her, and had her husband killed. The prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin. David did not even recognize what he had done, but once confronted, David cried out in anguish and repentance before the Lord. Read Psalm 51 and hear David’s cry, *“Have mercy upon me, O God...Against You, You only have I sinned And done this evil in Your sight.”*

– It would have been easy for David to have become LOST in his guilt for years and decades to come...to carry the guilt for what he had done with him...allowing it to “eat away” at him and affecting

his leadership and the future of an entire nation.

Often we allow the guilt of past misdeeds to dictate our present, our future. We are LOST in a “sea of guilt,” trying to stay afloat...depressed...unable to overcome the thought of what we have done... how we have hurt God and others.

John Newton discovered that he did not have to carry the guilt of his past with him forever...He was able to give it over to God...through Jesus Christ...repent...and experience forgiveness. Later, Newton, who was once a slave trader, penned the words, *“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...I once was lost, but now am found...was blind but now I see.”*

If you are lost in your guilt...like David...cry out to God and repent...give Him your guilt and your sins...accept the forgiveness only He can offer to all of us who are LOST.

### **Friday, September 22, 2017**

**Read Romans 3: 21-26; Luke 7: 36-50; and Luke 19: 1-10.**

Read the story of the woman with the alabaster jar. One of the Pharisees who had invited Jesus to dine with him says, when this woman comes in and washes Jesus’ feet with her tears, *“This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.”* This woman’s past traveled with her...perhaps she was a prostitute...an adulterer... perhaps a thief...a criminal...yet, Jesus not only accepts her gift...her action of love...but says to her, *“Your sins are forgiven...Go in peace.”*

God knows your heart...open it to Him...Jesus would like to come and dine with you... He doesn’t care what others think...He only cares about what is in your heart and, like Zacchaeus, if you are ready to take a stand, and with His help, live out your faith.

Paul uses the word "*propitiation*" in Romans 3:25. He writes, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness...”*

*“Propitiation”* means *“something that appeases and makes favorable...an atoning sacrifice...”* A preacher once defined the word *“propitiation”* by telling the story of a time he went shopping with his mother. At the checkout he put all types of candy and snacks into the cart. Since there was a line of people behind her the mother went ahead and paid for the items. When the young boy got home, the mother chased him around the house, ready to give him a whipping for what he had done. Finally cornering him in a room...she simply said, *“No...I’m not going to do it...I’m going to let it go.”* The preacher said it was then he understood *“propitiation.”* His mom had stepped in and decided to *“drop the charges.”* Forgiveness. Mercy. Clean Slate.

In other words, we have messed up...we have sinned against God...and because of Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice...God forgives...God does not hold our sin against us...God wipes the slate clean...

We are all LOST, but we can all be found. This is the beauty of God's grace. Open your hearts to Christ and allow Him to find you...allow Him to cleanse you...Be FOUND!

### **Saturday, September 23, 2017**

**Read I Corinthians 13:12, Romans 6:23, and Matthew 25: 21.**

Spurgeon writes, *“One does not serve God for nought, they shall not work without a reward. ‘The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.’ We shall have our reward for what we do for the Master, and though it be not wages in the sense of debt, yet verily I say unto you, there shall not be a single true-hearted worker for God who shall not receive of his Master most blessed wages of grace in the day when he comes to take account of his servants.”*

Take time tonight to sit with God and just imagine heaven, being with Jesus, hearing the words *“well done, my good and faithful servant.”* Give God thanks for such a promise. Give God thanks for His amazing, amazing Grace!

**Don't forget to invite someone to church tomorrow!**