

## "Fairness" Matthew 20:1-16 Septuagesima 2022

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, our merciful Lord has poured out upon us many blessings. Our lives overflow with more gifts than we can count or notice. Every rational thought is from Him, every moment of health, every ability with which we work, every bite of food, every spare moment of enjoyment, and a great host of other blessings; all is from His Fatherly goodness.

Add to this the spiritual blessings that He has given solely by His grace. The richness of His sacraments is completely undeserved by us. The wisdom and forgiveness of His Word that shows us Christ crucified is a gift we could never repay. He has freely bestowed eternal life on us poor, miserable sinners through His precious Blood. On top of that, the Holy Spirit continues to produce in us many fruits. Our God is a truly generous God. He delights in giving gifts to us.

How ironic, therefore, that one of the main temptations for us sons of Adam and Eve is to question the goodness of our gracious Provider. They questioned whether their Creator was really giving them every good gift, or if He was holding back something. If God was really giving Adam and Eve everything, why was He keeping them from eating what surely seemed to be beautiful fruit that would make them wise?

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In all of us, there is a sinful old Adam that desires to doubt God's goodness. We especially have trouble trusting that God is loving when we compare our situation with others. Another person appears to get every good gift from God imaginable, although we see that he is lazy and not worthy of the gifts God gives. Meanwhile, we struggle with all our might to live a good life, yet the Lord seems slow and grudging to give us what we want. "I have been working long and hard in the vineyard, Lord. Why can't You show me a little more favor? Why can't You openly reveal how much You approve of my diligent labors? I should be getting more recognition." Indeed, it seems as if some people in the vineyard are pretty lazy. They do not work as hard as we do. At least, it seems that way to us. Is that fair?

Well, of course it is not fair. Nor is it fair that we receive forgiveness and life. Our tongues are equally unworthy that the Body and Blood of our Lord should be placed upon them. What is fair is that we should instantly die at the first touch of our holy Lord's Body. But our God does not work by what is fair. He works by generosity. He gives, and He gives, and He gives some more.

Yet the sinful old Adam in us wants to compare, so that we can see how much more we have worked than others. We want God and the people around us to notice how much better we are, how much more deserving. But the road called "deserving" leads only to hell.

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The people of Israel murmured and complained, even after the Lord brought them out of Egypt and fed them with manna from heaven. That was not enough for them. In the end, their bodies fell in the wilderness, as God brought them death as the consequence of their mistrust and complaining.

If we murmur against the Father's grace, we walk a perilous path. If we look down upon His mercy, why should He not withdraw His mercy? If we think His gifts are not good enough, why should He not withdraw His gifts? If we treat Him as if He is a terrible Father, then we are practically begging Him to reject us and send us away, outside of His gracious presence.

Although our old Adam wants to murmur and complain, may we instead see how vast is the grace of our merciful Father. He is ready to forgive, even when we have treated Him as if He is unfair. He is ready to give us mercy, even when we have treated His mercy as something to be taken for granted.

May He keep us in His grace, no matter how unworthy we act, by giving us the repentance and faith that trusts only in Him.

Christ did not murmur and complain. He alone of all mankind had the right to do so. He is the perfect and sinless one. He could have looked around Him and said, "Well, I'm certainly more worthy than

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him, and him, and her, and them." And He would have been absolutely correct. Yet He did not say that.

Christ could have complained that He was not receiving enough blessings. "Here I am, Father, doing Your will, yet now I have the flu? That's not fair!" And if He had said that, He would have been absolutely correct. Yet He did not say that.

Then they betrayed Him, and arrested Him, and spat upon Him, and tortured Him. His own disciples abandoned Him. This was not fair. There is precisely one Man who has deserved that no one ever betray Him or harm Him, and that is Christ. Yet He submitted to all that sinful men could do to Him with patience, always setting before His eyes the goal, which is the redemption of our souls.

For you, Christ patiently endured everything, even when they nailed Him to the Cross. For you, Christ willingly went up to Golgotha. He would not stop, and He would not turn aside, until He had shed His Blood and breathed His last, so that all sins (including yours) have been fully paid for by His precious sacrifice.

It was not fair. And that was the point. By the unfairness He endured, He proved that He is the merciful One. He is the gracious Lord. He is the true God who must show His incredible, unstoppable generosity to us. Then He rose again, to show that His generosity has purchased for you resurrection and life eternal.

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It is not fair that we receive all the wonderful benefits of His suffering. But we do. It is not fair that completely unworthy sinners like you and me will receive the ultimate blessings awaiting us in the new Heaven and new Earth. But we will.

So when we look at the person next to us, whose sins and shortcomings are painfully obvious to us, may the Spirit give us the humility not to think ourselves superior. May He direct our thoughts to His mercy, so that we rejoice that this person has received the grace of God. So what if that guy does not work as hard as we do (if that is even true)? God in His generosity has lifted up that poor man, as He has lifted us up as well, in His Son Jesus Christ.

In His Name, who is Love. Amen.