

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from the Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen
The sermon this morning is based on the Gospel lesson which we've just heard. We pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We believe in a God who is just and righteous, and who expects justice and righteousness from his people. And that certainly includes civil justice and righteousness—laws that are fair, that protect the rights of all. It must then irritate us a bit that Jesus tells this story about how the landowner pays the exact same amount of money to people who have worked under extremely different circumstances. The one begins his work at 6 a.m., works all day long, though the heat of the day. Others join him at 9, at 12 and then at 3 in the afternoon. The last one is hired at 5 o'clock, when most of the work is done and the heat of the day is long passed. At the end of the day all of them, without exception, get one denarius, which was a kind of minimum daily wage back then. Just think how you'd feel if you were the worker who started at 6 in the morning. Especially when you hear that the last guy who started at 5 in the evening got the same amount of money you did, you'd feel cheated. And most likely you'd get legal counsel and take that employer to court. But Jesus says: That's the way *God's* going to do things in his kingdom." Does he have your attention now? Are saying to yourself: "Now wait just one minute!" It is hard to let your thoughts drift about or think about other things when you're irritated with or angry at someone or at a situation, isn't it. Jesus told us this story in order to illustrate how things will be in the kingdom of God, and yes there are different "rules" there. The kingdom of God marches to the beat of a different drum than that of our world. Where in our world we write justice and fairness in capitol letters—

has chosen to write grace and mercy in capitol letters over his kingdom.

Performance, achievement and production—the things on which wages are based, grades are given and promotions are made—simply have no place in our relationship with God. They certainly play a role in our doings with one another, especially when it comes to the laws that are passed, employer/employee relations, and the like. But: They are not the basis by which our standing with God is judged.

Jesus stresses that in this parable by maintaining that God is a sovereign God, who is entirely free in his dealings with us. Moreover, we belong to him, because we were created by him and saved out of sin and death by him. “Don’t I have the right (more accurately: the authority) to do what I want with what is my own?” The point here is that we don’t belong to him or get involved in his kingdom because we have signed a contract or negotiated some other deal with him. If we had, then first of all we would be able to demand payment in full for all our achievements and jobs performed for God. Also, we would be able to sue for wages that were withheld. I think from that you see the absurdity of this whole way of thinking—how could we ever take God to court? And besides, do we really want God to deal with us justly—for him not only to reward the good, but also punish the bad we’ve done? The more we truly grasp all of this, the more we’ll be able to put aside all our contract and achievement-based thinking when it comes to our relationship with God. That kind of thinking has its merits in our world, but in terms of our faith, it’s simply out of place.

The good news in all of this is that when God deals sovereignly and freely with us, he does so by showing us his unfathomable mercy, which is a sign of his

immense love for us. Thanks be to God that neither his mercy nor his love depend upon what we do or don't do for him. No, he shows us both without our having to earn them first or even to meet him half way or split the difference with him. And God does that not only for you and me, for the people sitting here in church, for the ones who are active in the congregation and for the ones who are exemplary Christians, good soldiers or airmen, and decent citizens. That also applies to the people for whom we don't care at all, even for our enemies, whomever they might be. We all, without exception, live by the grace and love of God, by the fact that he forgives sins and doesn't punish them, by the fact that he opens his arms to us and doesn't use them to slam doors in our face. Of course God never says that our selfish, dishonest or lazy behavior is okay, and he always calls us to turn from that. But he welcomes us into his presence any and every time we come—whether we do that early in our lives or shortly before the final whistle blows. And yes, those of us, who do all the work for the congregation, who put in the long hours and do the heavy lifting, will be treated the same as those don't. That doesn't mean that God doesn't appreciate or acknowledge our work, it just means he loves the ones who are on the outside, too, who haven't grasped that the Gospel is meant for them and that God has a job for them, too, in his kingdom, in this congregation.

A final thought: Maybe this way of thinking can rub off little bit on us, so that in our dealings with one another, which are shaped primarily by fairness and justice, we might also introduce a bit of mercy and love. Justice and righteousness can be so cold and indifferent at times. You remember all the statues depicting

justice. They show a woman holding scales in her hand and she is blindfolded:

Justice is blind. Mercy and love see very well and can help to warm things up a bit.

And now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.