

Year A

Jonah 3:10-4:11

Psalm 145:1-8

Philippians 1:21-30

Matthew 20:1-16

Proper 20

Good morning everyone,

It's always nice to see you.

I hope you know that I have also been praying for cooler weather right alongside you. I'm sure it's on it's way here soon.

As school kicks off I'm always reminded of a memory that I have from elementary school.

In elementary school we'd always line up in the hallway whenever we were going to another class or to lunch, the library, etc.

We'd line up in the hallways to get where we were going.

Now, my first name is Zachary, I've always gone by Zack.

My father is a bit over 6 foot, so is his sister and his older brother is about 6 8. All of my cousins on my dad's side are also above 6ft.

I have always been a tall kid.

So when we'd line up in the hallways there were only two ways to do so in an orderly fashion.

Alphabetically, by first name.

Shortest to tallest.

No matter which way you cut it, I was last. The very back of the line. Every time.

Boy did it get to me.

Back of the line, day after day.

One day I went up to my teacher, and told him that I was done being at the back of the line. And he heard me.

The next day we went out into the hall to go to the gym and we lined up alphabetically, but before we moved anywhere, he told everyone to turn around.

We were going to the cafeteria, which was in the other direction, not the gym.

So we turned around and I was at the front.

The last had become the first, and the first had become the last.

And for a brief moment it was empty hall space in front of me and boy did I trot forward.

I was in the front.

And I kept looking ahead at that empty hallway...

And I could hear my friends behind me but I couldn't see them any more.

There was a big laugh behind me and typically i'd be able to see what had happened...

Being up front... being first had not cracked up to all that i had thought it would.

All the work that I had done to achieve being at the front, being first... there I was, all by myself. At the top.

Big life lessons can be a tough thing for a kid.

And i think there's a sense in which we're all still infants, spiritually. There's so much we have yet to learn, which is why Jesus uses parables.

In this morning's gospel reading we hear another snippet from Jesus about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

Because the Kingdom of heaven is something that is so fast, so great, so awe inspiring that we need these metaphors to help us understand that which is truly outside of our realm of understanding

Any business owner would tell you that the landowner in the metaphor is not positioned to last long financially.

But we're not talking about running a for profit enterprise here.

Jesus is telling us something about the kingdom of heaven.

And if there's nothing else in this parable for us today, it can be thank God the Kingdom of heaven is not run like a for profit business.

What this parable is pointing us to this morning is that the reward won't necessarily be based on work.

That it's not always about what you're able to do or able to earn.

Because the good news of the gospel is that the work of salvation has been done. It is in the conquering of the grave on easter sunday, the empty tomb, the resurrection of Jesus who was crucified

That is where the work of salvation was done.

Jesus Christ crucified.

It is not earned in communion wafers consumed, crosses crossed, trees planted, bibles passed out.

We could not earn our salvation on our own.

What this parable is pointing us to this morning is that our salvation is not transactional.
Our bond with God is covenantal.

We are a covenantal people who from Abraham and Sarah, all the way through Moses and the prophets are called to live into that vow.

To love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbors as our selves.
To respect the dignity of every human being.

Because I am unable to do the work of obtaining my salvation, and so is my neighbor.

Jesus accomplished that, for both of us.

Because God looked down upon creation and saw something that was beloved. Worthy.

You.

Not because you did something to earn it.

Because of who you are. Because God saw you as so worthy of salvation and a full life that God became man and walked among us.

To show us what love truly is.

To show us

What the generosity and the grace of the kingdom of heaven look like in real time.

What it looks like to love your neighbor and to stand up for what's valuable in God's eyes.

The people of Nineveh were valued in God's eyes. The gentiles were too.

It's for everyone, regardless of where they are in line.

Because i'm less and less convinced that the first will be last, and the last being first is about Jesus coming to simply turn the line around.

I'm not convinced that flipping the social pyramid will fix the problems that the idea of the line created in the first place.

The notion of the last being first and the first being last is more about the reality that there is no more first and last.

Look at the parable.

Everyone receives that same reward, regardless of the work that they've done.

This is about seeing our neighbor as our equal. Not standing front to back but side to side.

All of us, getting the same reward in the end that we could not possibly do enough work to achieve.

The covenantal relationship with God. the love of God, and the grace of God being extended even to us.

Even to us, here and now.

See Jesus is framing this parable as the way the Kingdom of heaven is.

And sometimes in our heads we can picture the Kingdom of Heaven as a far off place that we will go one day and all will be made right. All will be well.

And sometimes I can easily, I can all too easily forget my role in living out my prayer of thy kingdom come.

That I play a role in the building of the kingdom of heaven here and now.

And that's the work. Some days it is tough stuff.

Some days it's not glamorous. But when you see the joy in the eyes of the others out there around you, and they see it in yours.

You learn that there's a reward in the work all on it's own.

And when others come out to the field to join you you're so excited that they've made it.

You didn't make it at sun up today? Me neither on my first day. Nor on my second.

But eventually, over time, you'll be excited to see that they have started to come and do the work all on their own. Earlier and earlier. Not because of the reward that awaits them at the end.

But because of the joy of being able to work the field of the landowner who is radically generous.

We don't do the work of building the kingdom of God because it earns us our salvation. We don't do it because it's glamorous or we get a bigger reward along the way.

We do it because God has been generous to us.

Because we have been blessed to be a blessing. To invite others into the field to work alongside us so they can come to know the generous landowner who loves us dearly.

Amen.