

Our lessons today continue to speak to us about how to live together in community. But they also remind us of something very powerful about the nature of God: grace. I want to explore both of these with you this morning.

Jesus' parable of the landowner and laborers, given our context, probably has us crying foul. Paying each laborer a day's wages no matter when they are hired that day hardly fits with our capitalistic mindset. But this isn't about capitalism – it is about the kingdom of God. Where everyone has what they need to survive and even thrive. It recognizes that not everyone is afforded the same opportunity and so God's grace and unbounded generosity is the great equalizer. And we should take note here that the Greek word that lies behind the "standing idle" we hear does not imply laziness but rather simply that these were without work, not yet hired despite their willingness.

Jesus concludes, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." This is the kingdom's corrective action when the world favors one population over another. It is a sign of the promise of God's justice, that extends far beyond what we consider "fair" and is something all of us, I'm convinced, endeavor to enjoy.

For Jesus' original hearers, this vineyard would have pointed to the land of Israel. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah both invoked this image for the people of God, with they as the laborers and God as the landowner. So, the actions of this landowner, God, would have stood in stark contrast to those they were familiar with. Just like the kingdom of God stands in stark contrast with the world in which we live. We miss that point at our own peril.

You all know the story of Jonah, how he fled God's command to prophesy to the wicked people of Ninevah, how he was then thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish, spending three days in its belly before being regurgitated onto a beach. How he did call out their great wickedness and how the people of Ninevah, royalty and peasant alike, repented and turned back toward God's way of living together, in community, with God at the center.

Today we hear the conclusion and discover Jonah, rather than proud that his prophesying worked, sulking that God would be so magnanimous as to forgive, rather than punish as promised, all this wicked behavior. Here is a clear picture of God's grace and it is surprisingly rejected by Jonah. And it makes me wonder how often we, noting the good fortune of a neighbor, whom we deem undeserving, grow angry with God's mercy and love.

It's not even because they get it and we don't. It's just simply because they get it. Think back to the first laborers hired to work in the vineyard and promised the daily wage of a denarii. They got what they were promised – yet they begrudged the landowner's generosity to others they deemed unworthy. This is a worldly, not kingdom, reaction. And we are being warned against it.

Paul is writing to the Philippians from prison in Rome. Despite being shackled, starved, and beaten, he continues with the work God has called him to: to proclaim, in the words of Jesus, the nearness of the kingdom of God. And his work, despite all obstacles, is bearing fruit. The people of Philippi are, for the most part, faithful, striving to live together in community as people of God's kingdom

instead of that of the empire. When Paul writes, “live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,” he is raising the bar – even though he understands this life, kingdom life, will be a challenge in face of the reality in which they live. But will also bring, through God’s grace and mercy, their very salvation.

I have invoked “God’s grace” a few times now. It might be helpful to unpack what this grace really is and what it can mean to us.

Grace is divine action in our lives, for the betterment of our lives. Grace can never be earned. It is a free gift from our generous and merciful God. We sometimes hear, “through the grace of God I did, or did not, was rescued, dodged” all actions bringing us in some way back to wholeness.

God’s grace is extended to all of creation, every man, woman, and child, no matter status, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or any of the many other ways that makes us different from our neighbor, because, in the end, we are all created by God and in God’s image. And since it is an undeserved and unearned gift, we don’t begrudge any who receive it, which would be usurping God’s role. This is a hallmark of kingdom living, for which we are all made.

So, what does God’s grace look like in your life? What does God’s grace look like at Trinity? How does God’s grace change us? Heal us? Knit us together?

I am confident that each of us has a story, or two, to share about God’s grace in our lives. Sharing our stories unites us, helps us understand that we are a community and all that entails. There is a certain generosity in sharing our stories because this creates a commonality that can only enhance that which binds us together: our faith in God working in and through our lives and the reality that our community is often the hands, feet, and voice that is the conduit between us and God’s grace.

Our stewardship team has chosen the theme “Growing in Generosity.” It comes directly from the understanding that “Together We Are Trinity.” God’s grace and God’s generosity go hand-in-hand and so they are inviting you to share your stories. Some will be written and shared in a book. Other’s will be shared in a minute or two in church. You simply get started and they will provide whatever help you need.

If grace is a defining characteristic of God, growth is certainly a defining characteristic of a Christian community. Together, through the grace of God, we grow in faith, in hope, in loving our neighbors, in loving God. And we share God’s generosity through our own generosity. Please be generous with your stories and help our Trinity family grow in all the ways God is calling us to do. Because together we are Trinity, the faithful and loving community that calls this place home.