

Seventeenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): "No Whining/A Grace Place"
Matthew 20:1-16
September 19-20, 2026
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

[Set "No Whining" plaque on pulpit --]

Lots of whining going on in today's Gospel parable! Which probably means there was **also** a fair amount of whining going on among the disciples to whom Jesus tells it. And we can guess there was **also** some whining among the readers of Matthew's Gospel.

Whining's not uncommon, right? Why else would there be plaques like this?? This one sits in the parsonage kitchen. To head whining off at the pass.... ☺ 'Any recent whining come to **your** mind? At home, work, school, the playing field, the grocery store, in on-line chats?

Whining: maybe we could call it **low-key kvetching**. Something has aggravated us; we feel we haven't gotten our due or that someone else has gotten **more** than **their** due.

That's how the earlybird/all-day workers feel in this parable, this earthly story with a heavenly meaning. At Bible study we agreed that we can understand their unhappiness, even their dismay, that they worked literally from sunup till sundown and got paid the same as the Johnny-come-lately's who came near quitting time, barely broke a sweat, and received the same paycheck. By our earthly standards, it's not fair, not fair at all!

Jesus had sussed out that His closest followers, His friends, might be expecting special treatment because they'd been in on the ground floor of His ministry, and because they'd genuinely sacrificed **a lot** to follow Him, like leaving their families and their livelihoods behind and traipsing after Him all over creation. Just before Jesus told this story about the workers in the vineyard, Peter had pointed out, "*We left everything and followed you. What do we get out of it?*" (Matthew 19:27, *The Message*)

28-30 Jesus replied, "Yes, you have followed me. In the re-creation of the world, when the Son of Man will rule gloriously, you who have followed me will also rule, starting with the twelve tribes of Israel. And not only you, but anyone who sacrifices home, family, fields—whatever—because of me will get it all back a hundred times over, not to mention the considerable bonus of eternal life. This is the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first."

But in case Peter and the others think that means everyone else is chopped liver, Jesus tells this story in which the latecomers get as much as the earlybirds. Our human payroll calculations fly out the window, our reasonable expectations get left in the dust: all overturned, a **Great Reversal** governed by God's more-than-generous heart.

We can understand why the delayed workers who arrived at 5 would say, "Thank Heaven we didn't get what we **deserved** at the end of the day! Thank God we got **ever so much more!**" But if we're more like the eager beavers who put in a full day's work for a full day's wage, and who feel salty that "those others" received as much we did, Jesus says: **"No Whining."** [Hold up the plaque!]

Jewish Christians whom Matthew addressed in his Gospel might have felt that Gentile Christians should rank lower in the pecking order than them. They may have railed against Gentile Christians rising to positions of leadership in the community of faith. Heaven knows that some who knew how Paul had persecuted Christians and held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death definitely protested his prominent, influential leadership in the church. So to those who question divine acceptance of Paul as an apostle "untimely born," (1 Corinthians 15:8), God asks, "... [A]re you jealous because I am generous?" (Matt. 20:19b) ¹⁶ *"Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first."* (Matt. 20:16, *The Message*) To those who question the validity and power of prayers prayed in a foxhole or conversions on Death Row, God asks,

"... [A]re you jealous because I am generous?" When we question why certain people we consider **unacceptable** are **accepted** by Jesus, God asks, *"... [A]re you jealous because I am generous?"*

Grace is the umbrella over this weekend's parable. **GRACE: G, R, A, C, E:** beautiful acronym for **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. **GRACE:** the love of God that comes to us as gift, not reward. **GRACE:** God's inexplicable generosity. As St. Paul said, "We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) We deserve nothing and we receive everything through our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ, who loves us "this much."

One commentary summarizes the heart of the parable of the workers in the vineyard this way:

...the [vineyard owner's] response makes clear that this vineyard, and by extension, "the kingdom of heaven," operates with a very different, apparently upside-down logic. Divine blessings are given not according to who works the hardest, but rather according to the free, generous will of the householder. Such blessings, then, are actually not rewards at all – but gifts. The governing ethos of the "kingdom of heaven" isn't work-and-reward, but rather gift-and-gratitude.¹

This is Gratitude Weekend at Holy Trinity, and the Gratitude Dinner is one expression of our faith family's heartfelt thanks for the many gifts of time, talent and treasure that each of you brings to the table of our Life Together, and that fuel the ministry we perform within and beyond this place, as little Christs in this world, proclaiming and living out the Gospel. In this sanctuary we proclaim the Gospel in Word & Sacrament, but during the other 6 days and 23 hours of the week, we do it through "faith active in love," the performance of loving deeds both within and far beyond these four walls.

Our Gift Given each week in the printed announcements highlights many ways we are in this neighborhood and in the world for good. We could never thank everyone by name, but please know, our faith family thanks God for **you**. Because of you, this congregation is known throughout our NJ Synod for the richness and beauty of our worship, for holy hospitality and heartfelt inclusivity, for a vibrant youth program, peace & justice advocacy, life-saving outreach near and far to the last, the lost and the least, for fruitful ecumenical relationships, and for financial generosity. We are known as a **grace place** – given who our God is, what higher praise could there be?

104 years ago this month, Holy Trinity came into existence. (For anyone who's wondered how Lutherans came to worship in a New England Colonial building instead of a Scandinavian A-frame, the answer is that the Presbyterians were here first!) Many buns have warmed these pews, many prayers arisen, many songs sung, many baptisms performed, many Lord's Suppers celebrated, many sermons preached, in this sacred place. But more important than the building is the faith family that makes this **community** a grace space, that worships here and then goes out into the world forgiven, gladdened, inspired, empowered to serve. Our banner reminds us that every door in this building is a servant's entrance into the mission field of God's beloved world. We go forth in joy to share the blessings we have received and to embody a generous God who is gracious and loving to all. Amen

¹*SALT* on-line commentary for Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost (RCL/A).

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham