

GRACE IS NOT FAIR, THANK GOD

When it comes to the kingdom of God, God's reign in the world is not fair. Think about how unfair it seems when someone, maybe a co-worker, or a friend, or family member gets the same pay or reward as you do for doing way less than you have done.

It seems to happen quite often. In our world of course, that is not fair.

But when it comes to God's reign in our world or God's treatment of each of us, thank God, it's not fair. If it were, only the top religious leaders, or the top givers, or the most religious people would get the blessings of God. It would be awful.

These words from our Gospel Lesson today can seem offensive because we want to be in control. Let's face it, we would like to be in control even of God and God's actions in the world.

We want to decide who is loved by God. We want to decide who God includes in God's family. We don't want God to accept everyone, maybe even our friend or stranger who doesn't think the way we do.

From our first lesson today, we see how Jonah is a good example.

Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh where God was sending him. He just knew that God was going to forgive the people there so Jonah tried to run away and was swallowed up by a whale and spit up on the shore and in today's reading, Jonah is pouting because of course, God forgave the people of Nineveh just as Jonah knew he would.

Jonah didn't want the people of Nineveh to have the same gifts of forgiveness which he had received from God, so he tried to run away.

At times, maybe Jonah lives in each of us. Do we want God to be loving and forgiving to every human being no matter who they are?

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Do we want everyone to receive the same benefits we feel we have earned from God? What about that one who has not seemed to care or pay any attention to God?

Or that one who does not seem to stop to realize that every breath we take is a gift from God, or that every sound of the birds singing in the early morning is God's gift to us, or that the sun and the rain are all God's gifts.

Or those who do not seem to take this virus seriously or take seriously that we have been put in charge to take care of creation and we need to wake up to that responsibility now before it is too late.

Our list could go on and on.

We can choose to run with Jonah away from what God calls us to do. God is not a dictator, but we need to wake up, to take God seriously and to realize that God is in charge and that love and grace is a free gift.

It doesn't seem fair that in this story Jesus said, the workers in the vineyard who showed up at the end of the day should receive the same pay as those who have worked all day.

But isn't that exactly the way God's love and grace works? Who has done anything to deserve it?

It isn't fair that God should care about the people of Nineveh who had shown their wickedness before God, but God wanted to give them another chance.

It is not fair, but that is how God's grace works.

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The grace and love of God is not like a paycheck for doing the work of God. As we believe in our Lutheran understanding , GRACE IS TOTALLY A GIFT OF GOD.

Over and over, I think back to the words of one of my favorite teachers at Luther Seminary, Gerhard Forde, who would say things like,

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW THAT THERE IS NOTHING YOU HAVE TO DO TO BE SAVED?

What are we going to do? And he would add things like well how about loving our neighbors.

How about loving the people of Nineveh in our world whoever and wherever they are?

How about loving God's people in this world who, like us, have done nothing to earn God's love.

When it comes to sharing God's love and grace we are all the same.

I recently read a sermon by a Pastor Phillip Martin Jr. who grew up in North Carolina and attended R.J. Reynolds High School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

In his high school graduation, there were no valedictorians or salutatorians and no student speeches at all. The principle had served there for thirty years and early on, he had done away with any and all accolades at graduation.

No one was allowed to wear any sashes for such and such honor society or any extra tassels or badges or anything else that might make them stand out above anyone else.

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All the graduates wore identical white gowns so that if you were in the audience, you were looking at one big group of equal achievers. There was no way you could tell class rank or how active anyone had been in extracurricular activities.

The lessons today are examples of God's unconditional grace which we can never get enough of.

May God continue to remind us that we are those workers who come to work at the end of the day and receive the same pay from God.

We don't deserve what God gives us, but that doesn't matter to God.

Grace is unfair because we can't do anything to earn it.

After all, as Jesus said, "AM I NOT ALLOWED TO DO WHAT I PLEASE WITH WHAT BELONGS TO ME?"

Thanks be to God! Amen!