

**“Tell Me the Stories of Jesus;
Parables that Challenge, Convict and Comfort”
“Fairness, Justice and Working for God”**

We are finishing our sermon series, “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus.” This final parable is a difficult one to read. It forces the Jesus’ listeners to ponder fairness and justice. All followers of Jesus are called to live out the kingdom of heaven. It is not always an easy task. This week begins with Labor Day. How does our work reflect our faith? Do we work for justice or just for fairness? How does our work together benefit the church, our community and the kingdom? Seeing our work, whether paid or unpaid, as God’s work is a gift. Our lives matter and what we do and what we say can be part of building the kingdom of God. This week, the Great Plains Annual Conference is participating in the general churches initiative “Praying our Way Forward.” It will include 75 weeks of focused prayer for the United Methodist Church, specifically regarding human sexuality. Each annual Conference has been assigned a designated week to pray and our week is September 3-9. May this story of Jesus help us as we pray and work to be builders of the kingdom of heaven. Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Fairness, Justice and Working for God”**

Prayer for the Week

God who knows us, we come before you in difficult times in the life of our church. Where there are no answers, we seek your answer. Where there is fear of division, we seek your comfort and unity. Where there is disagreement, we seek your discussions. We pray for the members of the Way Forward Commission that they lead with discernment the way forward for the United Methodist Church. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

9/04/17 Matthew 20: 1-8

This story of Jesus is very interesting. The vineyard owner wants to get the harvest done, so he looks for workers. He hires workers first thing in the morning, again at 9:00 a.m., noon, and 3:00 and again at five o'clock. Each time he goes he finds MORE workers in need of work. When asked why they were not working, they reply, "because no one has hired us." So the vineyard owner sends them to the vineyard. He promises the first workers a denarii, which is normal compensation for one day's work. All of this is pretty normal, people are hired, they work and they are paid. Tomorrow it will get interesting. For today, we are invited to ponder what it is like to wait and wait to be hired and your family is dependent on what you earn for food and shelter. Without working, they do not eat. Have you ever been hired at the last minute and been grateful to have employment? Have you ever offered work to someone who really needs it?

9/05 /17 Matthew 20:9-12

When the time comes to be paid, every worker received the same wage, the SAME wage. It didn't matter if they have worked twelve hours or one hour. The ones who had worked the longest "thought" they would receive more than those who had started late in the day, but they didn't. They were outraged that those who had only worked an hour received the compensation at they had. It wasn't fair! And it really isn't fair. There may be some difference between fairness and justice. Those hired last still needed the same amount in order to survive and feed their families. No reason is given particularly why they were not there first thing in morning, but the vineyard owner compensated everyone the same. Have you ever felt like you were treated unfairly? How would you have felt in the same situation?

9/06/17 Matthew 20: 13-16

When the workers complain, the vineyard owner is unsympathetic. The words of the owner have been twisted in recent years. The owner states, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" In recent history those words have been used to keep wages low and to justify a non-living wage by saying those who hire should be able to pay whatever they want. In truth, Jesus is using the owner's words to speak about justice instead of fairness. Each worker received a normal day's wages. Those who were hired at the last received exactly what they needed to survive for the day. The owner wasn't punishing those who worked longest, he was taking care of those who had no opportunity to be hired earlier. What do you think of Jesus' understanding that all workers need to be blessed with a daily wage that helps them survive and live? How does this parable invite you to understand the difference between fairness and justice?

9/07/17 Romans 12: 9-13

If we "love what is genuine" it allows us to find contentment at work, at home, and in everything we do. Paul is encouraging followers of Jesus to honor one another, create work environments that are beneficial to all, to take care of one another and those elsewhere. Think of some ways you serve God with all that you are and all that have. How is it that your life "contributes to the needs of the saints" and helps you devote yourself to God? Spend a moment to thank God for the work you do, paid or unpaid and the world which benefits from your work.

9/08/17 Romans 12: 14-18

Paul continues to describe what it means to be a "worker" in God's vineyard. He doesn't use that language, but he does describe behavior. Loving, showing honor, being enthusiastic, being happy in hope, being with people whether they happy or sad and considering all persons as equal. There is no better than or worse than, don't treat evil with evil, live in peace with all. We need those words in our world today. Whether at work, school or our neighborhood, wherever God's people are living, sharing and loving, we are called as God's workers to live out these traits. How will you live out your faith?