

Dear Friends in Christ,

Zack Greinke is the number one pitcher for the MLB AZ Daimondbacks. He signed a contract in 2015 for 206.5 million dollars with our home team. A reporter for the *Arizona Republic* newspaper did the math and figured that if Greinke threw 3,200 pitches it would come out to about \$10,000 a pitch. I don't know if the math is exact, but it is enough to make us envious. When you make \$15-20 dollars and hour, \$10,000 a pitch sounds out of this world. Someone might say, "*It is not fair!*"

Jesus says something today in Matthew 20 that doesn't sound fair.

In chapter 19 Jesus had just told a rich young man that he should leave all his riches and follow him. He promised treasure in heaven. (21) Peter asks at this time, "**We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?**" (27) Jesus promises there will be twelve thrones for his twelve apostles. Jesus concludes with some surprising words, "**But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.**" (30)

Jesus immediately follows these words with the parable that we have before us today. He teaches that any rewards or blessings that come from serving the Lord will be based on grace rather than merit or what we deserve.

When we hear this, it may seem that the Lord God is terribly unfair. The surprising answer that Jesus gives is that God is unfair. However, when we look at the whole picture we find out this is a good thing that God is unfair. In his grace and mercy, he gives us what we don't deserve. Let's take a closer look. You will learn...**How You Can Be Content with God's Grace.**

1. Understand that God's grace is not fair.

Parables are stories with earthly elements that we understand and they teach us a spiritual truth. Jesus parable of the vineyard teaches us that there are rewards or blessings for serving in the Kingdom of Heaven, but God's gracious blessings are not necessarily equal or fair.

A. We, Lutherans, understand from the Scriptures that salvation is a gift. It is. Jesus is not speaking of salvation here. His disciples possessed that. Peter had asked about blessings for serving in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' responds there are indeed such blessings. (vs. 1-2)

1. Jesus uses a picture from his day. Vineyard owners would hire extra help

for the harvest. The landowner goes to the marketplace at 6 a.m. He finds men who are willing to work. He promises to pay them a denarius. This is a day's wage. At 9 a.m. he hires more workers and at noon, 3 p.m. and even at 5 p.m. This is one hour before quitting time.

2. Jesus is picturing himself, the Son of Man, as the vineyard owner. He is calling people like the original twelve, to be his disciples and to serve in his kingdom. Jesus did not just do this in the 1st Century, but he does it through time and even today. The denarius in the story is basically telling us that our service does not go unrewarded. Remember in the last chapter he talked about a reward of thrones. The Bible does not say much about these rewards or blessings. They are given in time and in eternity. What follows tells us that we shouldn't focus too much on these blessings.

B. The parable gets interesting. The owner doesn't reward the workers based on what they merit or have earned.

1. The workers are called in and the ones who worked an hour go first and are paid a denarius, a day's wages. This is generous. They only worked an hour! The workers who have been out in the sun all day are cackling with delight. They believe their pay will be many times more. Then the owner gives them each a denarius. They are shocked.

2. In fact they are jealous and envious. This shows in their grumbling and complaining. "*We worked all day and you made these guys, who worked an hour, equal to us.*" The owner points out that they had no right to be upset. He gave them work. He didn't have to hire them. He paid them a good wage in a timely manner. He had been generous with them, they just didn't see it. As far as his generosity toward the other workers, wasn't it his money to do with as he pleased? He is right.

C. Jesus is bringing a very serious matter to our attention. Jesus has called some of us from little on to attend church, to memorize Bible passages, to attend Bible classes. You've been asked to serve committees, serve in the kitchen, count money, fold flyers and walk through neighborhoods knocking on doors. Then someone comes along who is a new member or a recent convert and they pitch in. Which is what we want, until they start getting praise from the pastor and the chairman. We think, "What am I 'chopped liver.' I have served for years and haven't been recognized."

There are other examples. Someone who has lived an immoral life comes to the Lord and enjoys good health. We who have lived outwardly moral lives, struggle with health, finances, etc. We do get envious and jealous

when others do better than us.

In the 10 Commandments the Lord warns us about jealousy and envy and bitterness. These sinful desires and thoughts often lead to sinful actions. It hurts the church family when we won't work with or fellowship with someone just because we have a grudge concerning their blessings.

We need to repent of such sins and look to God for forgiveness. God does forgive sins. Receiving forgiveness, we need to strive to serve without being envious and jealous of others. We need to serve contentedly. This may sound difficult if not impossible. With Jesus all things are possible. Jesus' words in the parable remind us of how you can be content with God's grace.

2. Understand God's grace gives us what we don't deserve.

When we hear that after a hurricane water is being sold for \$10 a gallon, it is easy for us to assume that this is wrong. This is price gouging. We think that because we live in a world of sinners. We have to remember that God is holy, without sin. He always has something good in mind. In this case when God's grace is unfair it is only because he gives us what we don't deserve.

A. It all makes sense when we go back to the cross of Jesus. Here we understand God's grace.

1. The Roman cross was used to punish malefactors or wrong doers. These were the worst of sinners in society. It is significant that God chose the cross as the instrument of punishment for our sins. As we walk this earth we aren't just impolite or careless. We violate God's holy and perfect will for us. Sin, in God's eyes, makes us the worst of criminals. I am not exaggerating, because where did God punish our sins? He punished them at the cross where the worst of criminals are punished. What you and I deserve from God is a cross!

2. Grace moves God to give us what we don't deserve. Instead of us, he punished Jesus on the cross for your and my sins, for the sins of the world! That is not fair, yet Jesus did it willingly! We don't deserve forgiveness, but in Jesus you have the forgiveness of all of your sins. So, we also receive what we don't deserve, everlasting life.

This alone is enough reason for us to not grumble and complain when we see others blessed or rewarded for things they do in service to Jesus. We have God's love and we have eternal life given to us. We are getting what we don't deserve! That is good!

There is more. We are blessed with more than the gift of eternal life.

B. Jesus indicates in the parable that as we serve to our God there will be blessings or rewards that become ours.

1. The denarius in the parable represents the rewards and blessings that we receive as we serve in God's Kingdom. The denarius can be any number of things. It could be material blessings, such wealth, health, happiness. It can be spiritual blessings such as a stronger faith, peace and joy. It could be honor and recognition in this life or the next. Jesus does not elaborate and we should be content with knowing that he will bless us.

2. Knowing that we are saved and blessed we can focus on serving. This what Jesus wants. One way to do that is to focus on Jesus and his word. He teaches us how to serve and how to handle our blessings.

Remember the Tax Collector Zachhaeus. He came to faith in Jesus and he promised to give big chunks of his wealth away to the poor. Jesus could have said, "*It is about time.*" Instead he rejoices in Zacheaus service and eats in his home. Jesus was not afraid to put himself last for others. When we understand God's grace, we can put ourselves last for others too.

Conclusion: When I started out today with Zack Greinke, I was not picking on him. He has done fine job for the Daimondbacks this year. I believe he works hard for the money he gets. I was only seeking an example of something that people might say, "It isn't fair!"

When people of the world hear that Jesus is coming back on Judgement Day, they might say, "It is not fair!" What isn't fair is that God's Son, Jesus, came into the world and gave up his holy life for us sinners. He didn't have to do it, but grace moved him to make himself last so we could be first.

We know that and therefore we shouldn't get upset at God's grace towards others. As you serve the Lord, I want to thank you for your service. It is good. It is important. Don't worry about rewards. We don't deserve them. However, the Lord will bless us. Not because he has to, but because he is gracious and he wants to. Rejoice in that fact that Jesus gives us what we don't deserve. Then we can live contentedly. Amen.