

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Is there a parent among you who at one time or another hasn't heard the declaration, "That's not fair?" Children seem to be hard-wired for fairness. It comes out in complaints such as, "His piece of cake is bigger than mine." Or "Why can she do it and I can't?" or "You love her better than me because...!"

It's the oldest contention in society. "That's not fair!" Remember Adam and Eve's two boys, Cain and Abel. They brought their offerings to God. For some reason, God accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's. "That's not fair," Cain thought in his heart and his resulting anger was the source of humanity's first murder.

Of course, it's not only children who demand fairness. That's why we have courts and judges and lawyers. People demand fairness. The question of fairness often comes up in the workplace where some people are paid more than others, even though they may actually work less.

That certainly seems to be the source of contention in this parable that Jesus tells. Those who worked through the heat of the day are paid the same as those who worked only in the last hour as the cool of the evening comes on. What could be more unfair than that? Well, the fact that Jesus ends the parable with the cryptic, "...the last will be first, and the first last," seems even more unfair.

However, this is not a parable about fairness or justice. Because, even the Lord knows, life isn't always fair. Rather this is a parable about God's mercy and generosity. The parable speaks to the truth about God that Isaiah the Prophet teaches us today, when he tells us to "turn to the Lord of mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts."

In this parable of the landowner and the workers, Jesus is giving to those who hear him a real life sense of the lavish generosity of God's merciful love. It really is an illustration of what we call "Amazing Grace".

Who here can claim to be worthy of such grace? Who has earned it? Who deserves it? May I offer for your consideration that the only One worthy, the One who earned it, the One who paid the price to attain it, is the One who offered Himself on the Cross on Calvary. Because he did, as the first-born of many, God's grace is freely given to all of us.

This parable tells us that God’s grace is freely given. We know that we did nothing to deserve it. We know that it cost Christ his life. And, as his followers, we hunger in our hearts to think that our lives lived in response to his act of self-giving love are proving worthy of that act. So, the questions become for each of us today, “How generously do I give of myself and my resources for the Kingdom of God? How merciful and forgiving am I in my relationships with others? How faithfully am I living out my citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

Amazing grace! It’s not fair! It’s not just! It’s lavishly and generously given—far beyond our ways, far beyond our thoughts—yet within our reach, thanks be to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.” Amen.