



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

September 21, 2008

### Pentecost 19 2008

One of the most common complaints against life is that life is just not fair. And that is a statement we all can agree with. There is just too much evidence in our living to support it. We live in a world where inequalities abound. Some people live in a spacious mansion while some people live ten to a room and some have no room at all.

Some eat at the finest restaurants where possibly more is thrown away than eaten. Some do not get to eat at all.

Some are in the right place at the right time and because of their hard work and dedication rise to the top of their profession or their company.

Others work just as hard and are just as dedicated but because of the breaks never rise much above where they started.

Some live with constant sickness while others enjoy incredible good health. I could go on listing example after example but we all see the picture. Life is unfair and it is hard to disagree with that.

But having recognized that reality how do we respond?

The gospel this morning is all about the most common and least productive response. Personal resentment. That is the primary emotion shown in the story of Jesus. Those five groups who had been hired at various times of the day all line up to get their wages. Those who had been hired last were paid first. And that's where the

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trouble started. You know if those who had worked a full day had been first they probably would have accepted their pay and gone home happy. But they weren't and they didn't.

You see the vineyard owner's generosity awakened their expectations. I think in their minds they began to make calculations. Oh if they get paid a days wage for one hours work then I ought to get paid 12 days for 12 hours work.

But that was not to be. The employer paid what he agreed.

And it is that that provoked the cry of injustice. They were disappointed, indignant, not because they had received less than they deserved, but because they had received less than they had expected. The resentment that they had was rooted not in their own misfortune, but in the unusual good fortune of their neighbors.

This attitude is so typical of our human nature and our society today. And at the same time it is so tragic.

And if it was carried to the extreme it would make it impossible for anybody to enjoy life because we would never be content with our lot.

There would always be someone who is doing better than us.

If you have 2 children and you give the first one a cookie and then you give the second one 2 cookies the first one immediately complains because he only has one cookie. We expect that from children but life requires more than that from you and me because life does not give everybody the same number of cookies.

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As people who call ourselves followers of the way of Jesus we need to understand what the landowner said.

In doing so there are 2 issues we need to focus on.

The first issue is how we think and approach this issue for ourselves. If we dwell on the things we think we deserve, but do not get, we will become bitter and resentful.

Like the workers in the gospel our perceived misfortune will always overshadow our true good fortune. But if we begin to focus on the incredible blessings of our life, many of them undeserved, we begin to move from being resentful and envious, to being glad and grateful.

Now this is not to deny that life has, at times, treated us unfairly, because it has. At other times it has paid us exactly what owed us. But most of our life is a gift.

We all have something in common with those men who were paid a full days pay for one hours work. If we focus on that truth our problems with the unfairness of life will be drastically reduced.

The second issue in approaching this is how we relate to other people in need. Our responsibility is to go beyond encouraging words. It is all very well to remind others to count their blessings and that could be all that some people need. But there are some who need more than words or encouragement. There are those without a home and those without food. There are some without a few of the basic necessities of life. There is a great need today for people who know and understand that sometimes life is unfair and more importantly to do something about it. The estate owner in Jesus story was that kind of person. By the standard of his day he paid his

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employees more than he had to, more than was expected. Why would he do that? Well the most probable answer is that they needed it and he wanted to give it.

You know I remember when Paul Newman started his food company and all the profits were given to charity. A reporter asked him why and Paul Newman said Why not? I don't need it.

You and I do not need to be rich to advance the kingdom of God. All we need to do is focus on the good things we already have and fashion our hearts and wills to making difference for others.

Amen.

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