

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Road Map
Pastor Roger W. Huffman

Matthew 20:1-16
October 11, 2020

The shock and wonder of: *the last will be first, and the first, last*

- *the last will be first, and the first, last*
- What? It sounds like a *riddle*? *Why would the first be last? They are first! Why do the last get to be first? That's not fair. That's not the way things work.*
 - ◆ First in the lunchline - first picks of favorite foods. First out to recess.
 - ◆ Pick players first - pros or playground - get the player you want/need.
 - ◆ 1 child cuts the pie - the other one picks first. Perfectly cut pieces - fair
 - ◆ 1st in line for tickets or limited quantity Black Friday Sales item
 - ◆ **1st is best. Last, you lose.** That's the way it works. **But not with God!**
- *Context:* After the young rich ruler wasn't willing to give up his lifestyle to follow Jesus - Peter asks: *What will we have? We've given up everything.*
 - ◆ Jesus' answer concludes with this *riddle* - a puzzling statement: *Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.* Matthew 19:30
 - ◆ Jesus gives this parable to explain this puzzling phrase - this *riddle*.

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- ❖ The vessel of the Parable.
 - Indeed the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went ...to hire workers*
 - *Kingdom of heaven* - **not** heaven. Jews substituted *heaven* for *God*.
 - *Kingdom of heaven* - **not** about location. It's about the **way God reigns/operates**
 - God operates like this landowner. Listen and learn.
- ❖ The landowner's **shocking** way of operating.
 - Starts out normal. No surprises. **But** the conclusion: **shocking!**
 - ◆ Start with *the last* and proceed to *the first*, paying each of them the same.
 - ◆ *That's not the way things work! That's not fair - not the way it should work.*
 - ◆ It's **only fair** if *you offer equal pay for equal work*. True in our realm.
 - **He was fair!** That was a fair and normal wage. They agreed to it when hired.
 - ◆ The landowner was not cheap! He didn't take advantage of them.
 - He was **shockingly good** and **generous!**
 - ◆ Shown in his initiative to seek out people to employ
 - ◆ *I will give you whatever is right.* Wow. Beyond fair. Good. Very generous.
 - ◆ The *riddle* or mystery statement is repeated at the end of the day.
 - *pay them their wages, starting with the last group and ending with the first.*
 - *...the last will be first, and the first, last*
 - ◆ The story gets our attention. It reveals: this is **how God operates.**
 - This pulls back the veil and reveals exactly what Isaiah said,
 - ⁸ *Certainly my plans are not your plans,*
and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD.
 - ⁹ *Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,*
so my ways are higher than your ways,

- ❖ See the wonder and make God's ways your ways.
 - The parable not only reveals God's ways, but it exposes our ways of operating.
 - I can identify with the objections of the first hired. **You too?**
 - ◆ *Is my long day of work worth nothing extra?*
 - ◆ *Don't you appreciate all that I have done and sacrificed for you!*
 - ◆ Where's the focus? On **self!** *What's in it for me?* That's our sinful M.O.
 - ◆ As if the purpose of this life is to live for self, making sure we're treated right.
 - ◆ This shallow incomplete view of justice:
 - blinds us from seeing God's wonderful goodness
 - gives an over inflated view of self and the merits of my work (ignoring sin)
 - Those who persist reveal they do not belong in God's kingdom.
 - Their ways are not his ways. And his ways are not their ways.
 - Eternal separation from God awaits those who die thinking this way.
 - ◆ We cannot overstate the danger of obsessing over being treated fairly
 - Not just by God, but even by people, especially in church. **Fair** blocks **love**.
 - Peter and all disciples need to replace *what's in it for me* with God's wonder.
 - Place yourself in the sandals of the last hired.
 - ◆ *A full denarii! Wow! What a generous owner. I don't deserve that.*
 - That's the definition of **grace**. *God's gift of undeserved love*. Most wondrous.
 - Look what it reveals about the owner.
 - His ways are unique - superior - kind - generous - good - unexpected
 - ◆ It's humbling to be the recipient of such goodness and generosity.
 - Jesus was headed to Jerusalem to reveal just how generous
 - ◆ Without us asking - he took on and fully paid for our inflated egos - sin
 - ◆ He rose to give us the gift of eternal life - to live with God forever.
 - ◆ We couldn't earn this gift. Our deeds deepen our debt. He earned it for us.
 - ◆ Shocking - stunning - wondrous unimaginable way of our Lord.
 - ◆ **Our reaction** to being treated so generously is **also most telling**
 - Those focused on what I get out of life show up at 4:45 to work the 1 hr shift
 - Unfazed by the owner's undeserved love - still focused on selfish self.
 - Left without a clue about the superior ways of God, stuck in sinners' ways.
 - Stunned by his wondrous love, we're humbly honored to serve in his kingdom!
 - His care is not contingent on our performance!
 - Serving him is what we were made for. There's fulfillment and purpose.
 - Working for and with him we hope to learn his ways and be more like him.
 - When you are captivated by his generosity, you don't worry about your pay.
 - ◆ You know that what he considers right far exceeds what you can imagine.
 - ◆ There is no higher honor or calling than to serve the Living God.
 - ◆ We who know our humble station - our sin and unworthiness - yet 1st.
 - ◆ We understand that those who consider themselves so important that God should be impressed will be last. Losers, not belonging in his kingdom.
 - ◆ That's the way God's kingdom of unexpected grace works.

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