

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020 - 16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Jonah 3:10-4:11 (NRSV)

Jonah had a major problem with obedience and a major problem with compassion.

God told him to go northeast – to Nineveh. Instead he went west. “He set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” (1:3)

Was there a time in your life when you have done the same? “He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.” (1:3)

A raging storm – a giant fish – a growing bush – a gnawing worm. God will use whatever it takes to get our attention. What has God used to get your attention?

The sailors come across much better than Jonah - “The men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not.” (1: 13)

Versus Jonah – “You are concerned about the bush. Should I not be concerned about Nineveh?” (4:10-11)

It is tragic when people who do not claim to be following Jesus act better than those who do.

When have you been bothered by whom God gives His grace to?

Psalm 145 (NRSV)

⁴ One generation shall laud your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.

It is absolutely imperative that each generation pass on the faith to the next generation.

The Christian faith is always only one generation away from extinction.

² Timothy 2: 2 – “And what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.”

After Moses vs. after Joshua

⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Philippians 1:21-30 (NRSV)

¹² I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped spread the gospel.

¹³ It has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ.

¹⁴ Most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

¹⁸ Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

²¹ For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

Paul was a man who knew he could not lose.

What would you be willing to do and/or to try if you knew that you could not lose?

²⁷ Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that I will know that you are ²⁸ in no way intimidated by your opponents.

Are you living your life in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel? If not, what needs to change?

Who intimidates you? What could you do about it?

Matthew 20:1-16 (NRSV)

The Gospel reading for this coming Sunday strikes at our sense of what is and is not fair.

There were three groups of workers.

Those hired first and early, who went to work after negotiating for a daily wage, which was not only fair but generous for unskilled or less skilled persons.

Those hired later, who went to work without a wage agreement, but who trusted the landowner.

Those hired very late, who probably long before had given up any hope of earning anything that day.

“Are you envious because I am generous?”

Grace has a real edge to it. It’s challenging, and it can even be quite disturbing. The issue of whom God wants to give His grace to can be disturbing to us, just like it was disturbing to Jonah.

1. Grace is a free gift from God.

Most of us would probably identify with the workers who put in a full day’s work. We like to think of ourselves as doing – or at least as having done – a lot for God. So it bothers us that God gives gifts rather than distributes wages.

Grace is our receiving from God far better than we deserve.

2. Grace keeps us from looking down on ourselves.

Here in this story we see our Lord’s compassion and concern for the forgotten.

Our confidence, hope, value, and joy are based not upon us, but upon the one who has chosen us.

3. Grace makes us equal to everyone else.

There is something in each one of us that wants God to grade on the curve, so that we can compare ourselves with others.

Grace given to us seems nice and good and right. But grace given to others can offend us.

4. Grace gives us all a new start.

Jesus ends the parable by stating, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

In the Kingdom of God first and last do not matter anymore.

Grace is not about who finishes first, nor is it about who finishes last.

Grace is not about keeping score.

Rather it is about having a complete do-over – a fresh start whenever you need one.

Do you need a fresh start? Do you need a new beginning? You can have one today.

Even though it will still be 2020 for three and a half more months, you can still have a new beginning today.

The more you feel your need for grace, the better candidate you are to receive grace.

So hold out your empty hand and ask God for His grace.