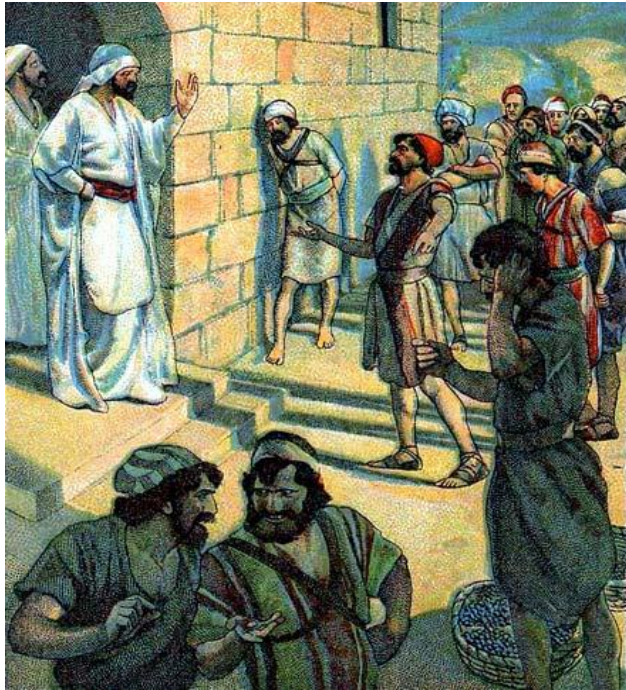


SEPTEMBER 24, 2023
SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER PENTECOST
“MADE EQUAL”



**ST. JOHN UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL
Telephone 618-397-6323
Office Hours Wed. & Fri. 9-2

Email– stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com

Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain – Email-

revrosemarycaptain@gmail.com

618-660-8894

Pianist – Tami Hughes

Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal

CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able
Respond when words are in bold

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE:

**PENNIES FOR MISSION: Maui Relief
Fund**

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:
(Inspired by Psalm 145:1-8)**

One: Bless the name of the Holy and
Sovereign One forever and ever!

**Many: Great is our God and greatly to
be praised.**

One: Bless the name of the Holy and
Sovereign One forever and ever!

**Many: This generation will tell the next
generation so they may tell the next
generation of the Holy One’s
magnificent and mighty acts.**

One: Bless the name of the Holy and
Sovereign One forever and ever!

**Many: We declare the abundant
goodness, gracious righteousness, and
holy love of our God. Praise the Holy
One!**

***INVOCATION:**

Might God, we enter your presence with
thanksgiving and hope. You have formed
us as your people. You join us on the
journey of life through valleys, upon
mountains, and on the plains. We set
our attention and seek your wisdom,
encouragement, and grace. Reveal your
will and display your glory among your
people as we worship your holy name.
Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 18**

“Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer”

***CALL TO CONFESSION:**

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we have been heard to complain. God is often blamed for calamities more than praised for the sustaining presence that works for our good. It is easier for us to be jealous of others than to rejoice in the opportunities God gives them. Surely we need to repent.

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**
God of abundance, forgive us for embracing a worldview that capitalizes on scarcity. Help us to know that you have given us enough for our journey. You have created us wonderfully and uniquely. Forgive us for comparing ourselves with our neighbor when we are called to love them. Help us to embrace how you have made us as individuals who may bring our singular gifts to our common life.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved, you are enough. God loves you as you are for who you are. We, collectively, have enough and may share in a common life where all may flourish and live in harmony as our Creator intended and designed. You are forgiven and free to embrace the life that is uniquely yours.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat)
(end) One God always here.**

One God always here.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Exodus 16:2-15

²The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert. ³The Israelites said to them, “Oh, how we wish that the LORD had just put us to death while we were still in the land of Egypt. There we could sit by the pots cooking meat and eat our fill of bread. Instead, you’ve brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death.”

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “I’m going to make bread rain down from the sky for you. The people will go out each day and gather just enough for that day. In this way, I’ll test them to see whether or not they follow my Instruction. ⁵On the sixth day, when they measure out what they have collected, it will be twice as much as they collected on other days.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “This evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ⁷And in the morning you will see the LORD’s glorious presence, because your complaints against the LORD have been heard. Who are we? Why blame us?” ⁸Moses continued, “The LORD will give you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning because the LORD heard the complaints you made against him. Who are we? Your complaints aren’t against us but against the LORD.”

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole Israelite community, ‘Come near to the LORD, because he’s heard your

complaints.”¹⁰ As Aaron spoke to the whole Israelite community, they turned to look toward the desert, and just then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

¹¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, ¹² “I’ve heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat. And in the morning you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³ In the evening a flock of quail flew down and covered the camp. And in the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. ¹⁴ When the layer of dew lifted, there on the desert surface were thin flakes, as thin as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” They didn’t know what it was.

Moses said to them, “This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

EPISTLE LESSON: Philippians 1:21-30

²¹ Because for me, living serves Christ and dying is even better. ²² If I continue to live in this world, I get results from my work. ²³ But I don’t know what I prefer. I’m torn between the two because I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better. ²⁴ However, it’s more important for me to stay in this world for your sake. ²⁵ I’m sure of this: I will stay alive and remain with all of you to help your progress and the joy of your faith, ²⁶ and to increase your pride in Christ Jesus through my presence when I visit you again.

Live worthy of the gospel

²⁷ Most important, live together in a manner worthy of Christ’s gospel. Do this, whether I come and see you or I’m absent and hear about you. Do this so that you stand firm, united in one spirit and mind as you struggle together to remain faithful to the gospel. ²⁸ That way, you won’t be afraid of anything your enemies do. Your faithfulness and courage are a sign of their coming destruction and your salvation, which is from God. ²⁹ God has generously granted you the privilege, not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for Christ’s sake. ³⁰ You are having the same struggle that you saw me face and now hear that I’m still facing.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 20:1-16 Workers in the vineyard**

20 “The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² After he agreed with the workers to pay them a denarion, (a typical pay for a day’s work) he sent them into his vineyard.

³ “Then he went out around nine in the morning and saw others standing around the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I’ll pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ And they went.

“Again around noon and then at three in the afternoon, he did the same thing. ⁶ Around five in the afternoon he went and found others standing around, and he said to them, ‘Why are you just

standing around here doing nothing all day long?’

⁷“‘Because nobody has hired us,’ they replied. He responded, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’

⁸“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and give them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on finally to the first.’ ⁹When those who were hired at five in the afternoon came, each one received a denarion. ¹⁰Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarion. ¹¹When they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²‘These who were hired last worked one hour, and they received the same pay as we did even though we had to work the whole day in the hot sun.’

¹³“But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn’t I agree to pay you a denarion? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Don’t I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I’m generous?’ ¹⁶So those who are last will be first. And those who are first will be last.”

These are the ancient words
revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “What is fair in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

The first time I ever read this parable, many years ago, the hair on the back of my neck stood up. First, I was shocked and then I got angry. “WHAT? This isn’t fair. Why do all the workers get paid the same, even those who only worked an hour?!!”

Now that I must preach on this passage, I have to calm down and take a wider view of this parable. After all, Jesus is trying to teach us something. Every parable Jesus gives us is a message to us about God, discipleship, the new covenant of love, and how to treat each other.

Last week we read a parable about forgiveness. We did not read the story from Matthew 19:16-22 of the rich young man who asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good thing must I do if I’m to possess the life of the age to come?” The young man wasn’t simply asking about how to go to heaven after he died. As we’ve seen often enough, the phrase “kingdom of heaven” doesn’t mean that. According to Rev. N.T. Wright, this phrase, kingdom of heaven, means “God’s sovereign, saving rule coming to transform everything, coming to bring the whole creation into a new state of being, a new life, in which evil, decay and death itself will be done away.”

Many, perhaps most Jews of Jesus’ day, believed that Israel’s God would bring in this new age, and would do it very soon. The question they were asking, in several different ways was;

who would benefit from it when it happened? Who would inherit the 'age to come'? Who would gain the life of the new age, or, as in many translations, 'eternal life'? Instead of giving this young man more complex legal instructions, Jesus has the simplest of commands; sell up, give it away and follow me.

As with so many lessons Jesus gives, some people have a problem with simple commands from Jesus. They want to know where to get a parachute, or buy a life saver. They can't imagine loving their neighbor as themselves, for example. After all, my neighbors have many children who are always dirty, and the couple isn't even married!

In Mathew 19:23-30 the theme is the first and the last. And then we come to today's parable. Who is first and who is last and what does that mean? And who decides what each will receive? Who decides what is fair?

To the workers who complained about the last receiving the same as the first, the landowner replied, "15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I'm generous?"

We can scream and holler all we want, but if God chooses to be generous to all people, even those WE think are not worthy, that is not ours to decide. How often do we make judgements about other people? "Don't give that beggar any money. He will just use it to buy drugs."

Is it fair that God forgives ALL sinners? We want MORE mercy than all those in prisons. We get angry when God rewards those people who don't even go to church. And the list goes on.

"The first will be last, and the last first." No matter what we were taught all our lives to be first in line or by people who work hard to "get ahead" of everyone else in business or on our highways, that's not the way of the kingdom of God. Can we change our minds and hearts to be happy being last? God says, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I'm generous?" Amen.

HYMN NCH 503

"O Savior, Let Me Walk with You"

PASTORAL PRAYER:

We draw near to you, Generous God, as we slow down our thoughts, take a deep breath, and relax in your arms. We come not just with complaints and petitions but with praise and contrition. We are in awe of your mighty mercy, forgiveness, and love for all humans and nature.

Heavenly Sovereign, save us from the jealousy that seeks to detract from the accomplishments of others, especially the young and those who come late in life to your service, that all of us working together may find joy in serving you as one body, one in Spirit, one in mind.

Today we remember all those struggling with health problems. May they seek comfort in knowing you are with them always and you are sending

others to help them. We pray for all those on our prayer list.

We remember all those affected by storms, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or tornadoes. They grieve for their loss, but they are reminded of God's hope for them that they remain in God's eyes.

We pray all these things in the name of your Son . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

**PRAYER RESPONSE: Three-fold Amen.
Amen, Amen, Amen.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

Philippians 1:2 encourages us to "Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel." May we live generous lives that reflect the fullness of the gospel, unity of the spirit, and faith in our God and God's church.

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

**Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

Great God, please receive our gifts for the glory of your name and the blessing of your people. May we be dedicated stewards of your abundance and use these gifts for the benefit of your kingdom. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 75 "Lord, Make Me More Holy" First four verses**

***BENEDICTION:**

(Please remain in your seats during the postlude)

May the love of God assure you, the hope of God guide you, and the peace of God sustain you as you go receiving and extending God's grace in the world. As Paul told the Philippians, "**Live worthy of the gospel**".

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"