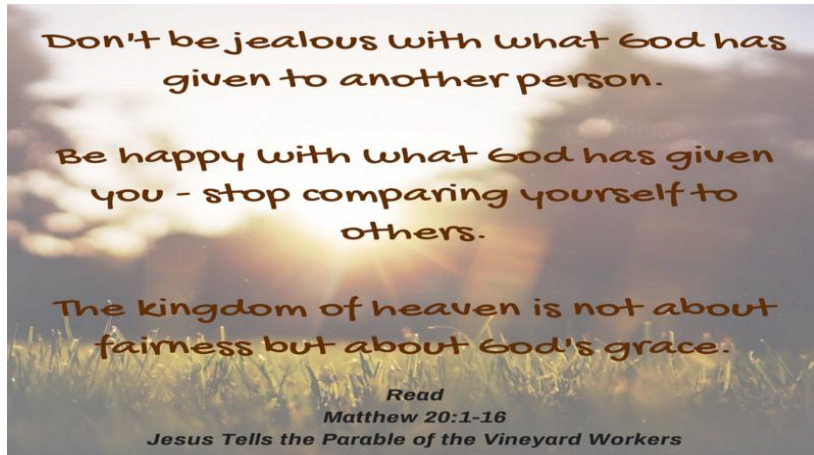


SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2026
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail Fairview Heights, IL

Telephone 618-397-6323

e-mail– stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com

Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist/Pianist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

Bible translation – CEB Common English Bible

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: “Song of Trust” Bertha R. Frick

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Deaconess Parish Nursing Ministries

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP (INSPIRED BY PSALM 105)**

One: O give thanks to the Holy One! Tell of God’s wonderful works.

Many: Declare God’s marvelous deeds among the peoples.

One: O give thanks to the Holy One! Give glory and rejoice!

Many: Sing praises to our God! Let our hearts be glad!

One: O give thanks to the Holy One: Remember the miracles and the judgments.

Many: The Holy One has remembered us. Praise God!

***INVOCATION:**

Sovereign and Awesome God, we come to worship you, to know you and to be known by you. Expand our hearts to love fully. Build our courage to receive the truth. Nurture our spirits to be gracious, merciful,

and kind. Transform us in your image and for your glory as we dwell in your presence. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 465 “Teach me, O Lord, Your Holy Way”**

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE (Inspired by Romans 14)**

Just God, we acknowledge that accountability is both a gift and a necessary step toward healing and repair. We also know that we do not sin against you alone. Forgive us for only seeking absolution from you for our benefit. Help us to reconcile with siblings, neighbors, friends, and enemies through recognition of harmful outcomes and committed actions toward repair. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

The Holy One is faithful to forgive and extends grace and mercy lavishly. At the same time, God wants us all to be well and whole. The Holy One will strengthen us to be accountable to both God and one another as well as to do the work of restoration and repair.

***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 twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Exodus 16:2-15

² The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert. ³ The 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.”

⁴ Then 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. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they measure out what they have collected, it will be twice as much as they collected on other days.” ⁶ So 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. ⁷ And 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?"

⁸ Moses 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."

⁹ Then 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.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c

Page 691

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 denarion was a typical day's wage) 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.' ⁹ When those who were hired at five in the afternoon came, each one

received a denarion. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarion. ¹¹ When 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?' ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the same as I give to you. 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?' ¹⁶ So those who are last will be first. And those who are first will be last."

MESSAGE: "What is Jesus teaching us?"

I know! I know! Everybody hates this parable. The first time I read it, I was shocked, too. "That's not fair!" "That's not justice!" What is Jesus trying to teach us? How did he come up with this one? All the workers get paid the same even when some worked all day, and some worked 45 minutes?

My goal today is to give you a different view of this parable and to understand the message Jesus is trying to give us.

It's important to realize that Jesus doesn't intend the story to serve as a comment on the social justice of his day. How likely such an incident is to have happened we can only guess, but most people who have studied that world think it is very unlikely. Jesus is accepting, for the purpose of the story, the social and economic power of the landowner, in order to say something about God: what he would say to rich land owners themselves, then and now, may be guessed from chapter 19. (The first will be last and the last first.)

But what is Jesus saying about God, and why is he saying it here? To answer this we need to look a bit more closely at the last group of workers, the ones who were hired when only one hour of the day was left. It is curious, we may suppose, that they hadn't been spotted before. Had they not been in the market place earlier? The vineyard-owner questioned them: why haven't you been working? Their answer is revealing: nobody has hired us, nobody has given us a job. Nobody, in other words, wanted them. They were, perhaps, the sort of people everybody tried not to hire.

But the landowner hired them, and paid them the same as the people who had been slaving away all day in the heat of the sun. As in so many of Jesus' stories, the landowner is obviously standing for God,

and the workers for Israel. Who are the different categories of workers meant to represent?

Jesus probably intends the parable as a warning to the disciples themselves about their own attitudes. When Jesus said, at the end of the previous chapter, that those at the front would end up at the back, and vice versa, it may have seemed that "those at the front" was referring to the rich and powerful, and that those at the back meant the disciples themselves.

However, that saying was part of the answer to Peter, after his somewhat self-centered question in 19:27 ("We've left everything and followed you; so what is our reward?") It's possible that, already in chapter 19, Jesus is intending the riddling saying about first and last, the front and the back, to be a warning to the disciples themselves: don't think that, because you've been close to me so far, you are now the favored few for all time. I bet the 12 men were really shocked to hear that; just like we were when we first read that parable. (The disciples worked the longest but paid the same as those who just showed up at Christmas and Easter.)

I think that this is the main thrust of this story in chapter 20. It goes only too well, when we read it like this, with the rest of the chapter, which is a warning to the disciples about the danger they are in,

supposing that, because Jesus is bringing in the kingdom of heaven, they are going to become rich and famous in their turn. That's not the sort of thing, Jesus warns them, that God's kingdom is about. They may have set out with Jesus from the very beginning; but others may well come in much later and end up getting paid just the same, the regular daily wage (denarion).

God's grace, in short, is not the sort of thing you can bargain with or try to store up. It isn't the sort of thing you can bargain with or try to store up. It isn't the sort of thing that one person can have a lot of and someone else only a little. The point of the story is that what people get from having served God and God's kingdom is not, actually, a "wage" at all. It's not, strictly, a reward for work done. God doesn't make contracts with us, as if we could bargain or negotiate for a better deal. God makes covenants, in which God promises us everything and asks of us everything in return. When God keeps God's promises, God is not rewarding us for effort, but doing what comes naturally to God's overflowingly generous nature.

There is always a danger that we get cross with God over this. People who work in church circles can easily assume that they are the special ones. God's inner circle. In reality, God is out in the

marketplace, looking for the people everybody else tried to ignore, welcoming them on the same terms, surprising them (and everybody else) with God's generous grace. The earliest church clearly needed to learn that lesson. Is there anywhere in today's church that doesn't need to be reminded of it as well?
Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: "My Cup Runneth Over" Video

PASTORAL PRAYER:

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

PRAYER RESPONSE: 775

**And God will raise you up on eagle's wings,
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,
And hold you in the palm of God's hand.**

OFFERTORY INVITATION:

Let us give good gifts for the needs of our community with generous and loving hearts.

OFFERTORY: "Make Me a Servant" Kelly Willard

***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.**

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

**Loving God, thank you for the opportunity to
participate in spreading the good news through the
impact of the resources we offer today. Bless these
gifts, magnify them, and sanctify them for your
glory. Amen.**

***CLOSING HYMN: 495 “Called as Partners in Christ’s
Service”**

***BENEDICTION:**

**As you go, spread the love and hope of Christ.
Let generosity be your guide.
Let love be your compass.
And let peace be your destination**

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571**

**O God of Love, O God of Peace
Make wars throughout the world to cease.
The wrath of human wrong restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.**

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: “Finale” C.L. Koch-

PRAYER LIST: Jim Warning, Pattie French, Kim
Holmes, Nancy W., Becky Ballard, Russ Hartmann,
Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Pam and
Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Wayne
Huss, our Beloved Country.