

**Full Service Text:
Sunday September 20, 2020
Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Music: Beth Cruickshank**

Gathering

Introit

Words of Welcome

Announcements

- Today we continue to prepare to resume in-person worship on Sunday September 27th. In the sanctuary with me today are those who are part of the reopening committee, worship leaders, and those who have volunteered to help with things like greeting, ushering, sound, and video.

- A special thank you to Adam, Dawn, Pat, Bob, and Paul. Over the last two months these individuals have been working hard to help create policies and procedures for us in order to help staff resume use of the building and to help us to resume in person worship on the 27th. God has blessed all of us with the care, wisdom, and skill you have shared.

- A copy of our full COVID-19 Policy is available on our website. Also there you will find an abridged version for those who are attending in-person worship. The abridged version is also being distributed in a newsletter.

- Like everyone in the sanctuary, I will be wearing a mask during the entirety of today's service. In the near future, however, we will have a clear protective barrier in front of me in order to enable anyone who needs to be able to see my lips in order to clearly make out what I am saying. Printed copies of the service will be posted to our website.

- If you are planning on joining us for in-person worship please watch after the service for a special announcement to help you know what to expect when you arrive.

- For all who are worshiping in person, please remember that following local health unit guidelines we will not be singing our hymns today. I invite you to join me in the spiritual practice of silence or to sing internally, as we rest in the hymns, allowing the music and the words to hold us, bless us, and draw us together in praise. If you are worshiping at home you are welcome to sing as loud as you would like.

Recognition of Traditional Territory

- As we gather for worship we remember that for thousands of years, Indigenous people have walked on this land; their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives and spirituality. As we worship today, we recognize that we are all treaty people. We are part of Saugeen Treaty 45 ½ and we are gathered on the tradition territory of the Haudensaunee, Ojibway, Anishnabek, and Metis people. We acknowledge the ongoing pain and broken relationship that has come with colonization. We pray that God may lead us in working towards building right relationships.

Friends, come let us worship.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Centring Prayer – Micol (words not on screen)

Let us join together in prayer, as we centre ourselves in this time of worship.

We gather to give thanks:

for the stillness that renews,
and for the striving that drives us onward;
for the resting in grace, by a lake with a book,
and the blessed unrest that fashions new futures;
for the deep peace of being here and now,
and the wrestling with what's past
for the sake of tomorrow.

We give thanks that the whole of it
is held together by the one we call
the Christ,
that the peace and the struggle of our lives

is not in vain,
but is an offering of love
to this unfolding story of the universe
that we are telling with our lives.
Amen.

May God bless our worship and our lives.

("Held Together by Christ" From If Darwin Prayed by Bruce Sanguin)

Hymn: MV 4, All Who are Thirsty

Reflecting

Minute for Mission: Paul Cruickshank

Today's Minute for Mission can be found at:

https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/minutes_for_mission_2020_pdf.pdf

Gift of Music Beth Cruickshank

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16 Paul Cruickshank

Sermon: The Economy of Grace Rev. Micol Cottrell

How many of you back in childhood, in gym class or at recess, ever had to go through the common practice of being chosen for a team. I'm not talking about tryouts or when you are assigned to a team but those times when two people are chosen to be team captains and then they go about taking turns picking which kids will be on their team. Sometimes the team captains were the two best players, sometimes they were the most popular kids. When the team captains started choosing their teammates this was often based a little bit on skill but more often on popularity. There are few

other times in childhood where one's social standing among peers is put on such public display.

Today we hear one of Jesus' many parables about the Kingdom of God, or as Matthew calls it the Kingdom of Heaven. Now the Kingdom of Heaven isn't about a heavenly afterlife. The Kingdom of Heaven as Professor Matthew Skinner writes is "the way things are when God sets the standard."ⁱ

Jesus uses a first century grown up equivalent to that schoolyard experience of choosing teams in today's parable. Like in the schoolyard the experience he lifts up was an all too common experience of ranking, valuing, and writing people off. The Kingdom of Heaven is like this, Jesus begins, and he tells a parable about a vineyard owner who goes out early in the morning to choose day labourers at the market – the town's common area. They agree to the standard daily wage. Now a daily wage at this time is both the amount the majority of the population made for a day's labour but it was also the amount one needed in order to support oneself and one's loved ones for a day. It was just enough money for a day. Those chosen early in the morning are the first round draft picks and they are sent out into the fields to work.

At nine o'clock the vineyard owner returns to the market and picks more day labourers to go to work saying they will be paid what is just. They are the second round draft picks. The vineyard owner comes back at noon and again at three - the third and fourth round draft picks. Then something surprising, near the end of the day, at five o'clock the vineyard owner

returns to the market again. The work day is almost done. Seeing people standing there looking for work, the owner asks, “why are you standing here idle all day.” Their response is jarring. They are not being idle. No one has chosen them. These are the people who have stood around all day because no one would hire them. No one else wanted them. The vineyard owner chooses them and sends them to work.

When the workday is done the workers are paid in a pretty provocative way. Those who are hired last, those who no one else would hire, go first and to everyone’s surprise they get a day’s wage – they will have enough money for the day now, neither they nor their family will go hungry today. But when the early morning workers get paid last we are told that they are outraged because they only get a day’s wage when they expected to get more because after all, those workers who no one else wanted, got paid a day’s wage, aren’t they of more value?ⁱⁱ “The last will be the first and the first last,” Jesus ends his parable.

The disciples and the Gospel’s early audience would have known very well the shocking nature of today’s parable. Those who are standing around in the market looking for work at five are in a very vulnerable position. They would include those no one else would hire, those who are forced to live on the edges of society, those who are marginalized because of their physical abilities, because of their histories, because of many various reasons that rank individuals and communities of people. Jesus’ parable lifts up the injustice of society, an injustice that ranks and divides people and groups, leading to dehumanization and suffering, the injustice that states that some are of more value, worth, or dignity than others.

Today's parable invites us to reflect on a very painful reality of life. It is a reality that has been lifted up again this year as people stand up, call out, protest, and demand attention in marches like those held for Black Lives Matter. Life is a lot like that market place in today's parable. Life is a lot like that schoolyard many of us experienced when teams were picked and people were ranked. People, individuals and communities, are often ranked, some are chosen first, and others last, some are given more and others less. We live in a society that has long valued some over others, that has disproportionately given power and privilege to one group over another, that has polluted the environment with myths, stereotypes, and practices that create systems of discrimination and injustice that often are so deeply engrained. The painful reality is that people are often ranked and valued differently in this world because of their age, gender, ethnicity, race, ability, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, academic ability, and so much more. Today's parable invites us to give witness to how prominent the division this ranking system in life is and how different it is from the life God calls us to live.

There is another way to live Jesus tells his disciples. The dehumanizing realities where people are ranked, where people prop themselves up at the expense of others, where people and communities are marginalized and written off while others are given power and privilege are not the way that God envisions this world. This is not the way the world has to work. This is not the way the world is to work. Jesus presents a new vision for life to his disciples and to those around him. He constantly tells stories where the last are the first, where the powerful are humbled and those who have been

cast down are lifted up. He constantly eats and drinks and shares company with those who are looked down upon. He touches those who are untouchable. He loves those who have been told they are unlovable. He tells stories, like the one today, where those who are struggling to be chosen, to be seen, to be treated with dignity, to get what they need, are fully seen, are chosen first, are lifted up and honoured, and given what they need to live fully. Jesus reveals to his disciples a renewed way, the Kingdom of Heaven way, where grace is lived out in the form of justice and people take their place in reshaping the world.

Imagine the schoolyard and that moment of choosing teams. Now, imagine the child who eats alone every lunchtime and the kid who always drops the ball and no one ever chooses are picked first, are honoured for once, are lifted up, are seen, valued, and respected. What would happen if this took place over and over again? A wrench would be thrown in the whole ranking and valuing system that is all too common and a new way of relating to one another would have to replace it. That's what Jesus envisions in today's parable.

Perhaps we can write another ending to today's parable. Do you ever do that with a dream? I do. I wake up with a story that my mind has been telling me in my sleep and as I lay there waking up I decide to finish the story or rewrite the ending.

Let us imagine those grumbling first draft pick daily workers again. They storm out of the vineyard still cursing the owner, still angry at the five o'clock crew. Then they get home and as they are complaining over the

dinner their daily wage has allowed them to have, they look out the window and they see their neighbour. It is one of the people chosen at five o'clock, who has struggle every day to get work. Who often isn't really noticed by others, or sometimes mocked or laughed at for --- well it could be one of many different reasons. That neighbour is carrying food she has bought with her daily wage. That's when it all becomes clear. She needed that daily wage too. She needed the dignity of not just being chosen but being placed in the front of the line – seen, respected, and honoured.

Now imagine that world, Jesus says, a world where God tears down and replaces the ranking system that dehumanize and brings suffering. Imagine what could be built in its place if we all allowed God's grace to lead us. That, Jesus says, is the Kin-dom of Heaven. So we are humbled and we are lifted. We are made uncomfortable and we are healed. We are drawn together and we stand with Christ in the margins. The grace of God flows through us and we put our hearts, our minds, our lives to work as love becomes action in the form of truth telling and deep listening, healing and transforming, justice making and rebuilding. For the kin-dom of God is coming, is here and being made known, and we are all part of the amazing things that God is doing. Amen. Thanks be to God.

Responding

Prayers of the People

Let us join together in prayer:

God,
like the Israelites in the wilderness,
we too have known Your love,
and experienced Your care and provision.

You invite us to extend that love to the world around us—
to care for others as deeply as we care for ourselves.
And so we bring the needs of our world before You now.
In Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the many who do not have enough:
enough food to eat, or shelter to keep warm;
enough employment, or money to pay their bills;
enough medicine or medical care.
Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We also pray for those who have more than enough,
but who still struggle to find meaning and purpose in life;
who indulge in dangerous or self-serving activities
to dull their pain or loneliness.
Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God, Your grace reaches out to all of us.
You call us to live as citizens of heaven,
working together with one heart and mind.
Strengthen us to live in a manner worthy
of the Good News we have received,
offering our lives in service of Your kingdom,
where the last are first, and the first are last,
and there is grace enough for all.
Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

We give you thanks, O God, for all the gifts that are shared,
gifts of time, talent, and treasure,
that enrich your church and your world.
Bless the gifts we offer that they may be used to share your love near and
far.

We pray for Marjorie and Allan Gates,
for those who work in education, students, parents and guardians,
for all who are suffering because of forest fires, hurricanes, and other
natural disasters

...

We pour out these prayers to you, joining them with the prayers of all creation,
as together we hold in our hearts the words of 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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

*(by Christine Longhurst, re:Worship)

Hymn: VU 227, For the Fruit of All Creation

Following our blessing and musical benediction our ushers will help lead you out of the sanctuary. They will invite those at the back of the sanctuary to exit first. We ask that as you leave you are mindful of not blocking doors, sidewalks, or access to the parking lot and that you continue to keep safe distance of 2 meters.

Blessing

As we go from here,
May God fill our hearts, our minds, and our bodies,
with visions of hope, with the strength for renewal, with the power of healing,
that we may go from this place,
to help build a world more loving, more just, and more life-giving for all.
As we go from here may we see the face of Christ in everyone we meet,
and may everyone we meet see the face of Christ in us.
Let us go in love, in peace, and with God.
Amen.

Musical Benediction: Go Now In Peace

note: the one by Don Besig: Go now in peace, never be afraid, God will go with you each hour of every day....

Postlude

Recorded piece after re: resuming in-person worship

As we continue to find ways of living, worshiping, and connecting during this pandemic we continue to offer several different ways of worshiping with us at Grace. At home you can join us for worship on both Wightman TV and Eastlink TV or on Youtube. Printed copies of the sermon and prayers can be found on our website or can be e-mailed by request. Beginning September 27th you will also be able to join us once again for in-person worship.

For those who are joining us for in-person worship things will look a little different.

Before attending in-person worship we ask that you RSVP by phoning or e-mailing the church office by Thursday at 4PM for that Sunday's service.

Before arriving for worship we ask that you do a self-screening to ensure that you are feeling well and that you have not been in contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

When you arrive at Grace you will be to enter our sanctuary through the main doors near the sidewalk or the door with the ramp that enters near our elevator.

Masks or face coverings will be required while inside the building as per the local health guidelines. If you need a mask we have disposable ones available from the greeters and the ushers.

Hand sanitizer is available throughout the building and we ask that you please sanitize your hands when entering the building.

Greeters will be present who will welcome you, sign you in, and along with our ushers will be able to answer any questions you might have.

Our elevator is available and following local health unit guidelines we will be transporting only individuals in the same social bubble at the same time. Please keep your mask on and face the walls while in the elevator. Our operator will run the elevator as usual. An usher at the top of the stairs will help you off the elevator and into the sanctuary.

Our hearing assistance devices are available for the service and are cleaned between services. If you require one please ask an usher.

If you need to use a washroom during the washroom in the basement is available. Our ushers can help direct and our elevator can take you to that floor if needed.

After you arrive for worship our ushers will help you find a seat. We have spaced out our seats and we will be seating people from the front of the sanctuary to the back of the sanctuary. If you have physical needs that restrict where you can sit please let our usher know and they will help accommodate you.

Following local health unit guidelines during our service you will need to keep your mask or face covering on, there will be no singing, choir, or responsive prayers.

Following worship our ushers will help direct people out of the sanctuary from the back of the church to the front. We ask that you are mindful when leaving of not blocking doorways, our sidewalk, or access to the parking lot and we ask that you continue to keep safe social distance of two meters.

This and more information is available on our website on our COVID-19 updates page or can be e-mailed or delivered to you upon request.

We look forward to worshipping with you whether you chose to continue to worship at home or in-person.

ⁱ Matthew Skinner, "Matthew 20:1-16: Justice Comes In The Evening." Huffinton Post 09/04/2011.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

Information also drawn from the book Matthew In the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading by Warren Carter.