

Rev. Duncan A Burns  
Sunday, September 24, 2017  
Proper 20 - Year A - 2017

Several decades ago, I was a Youth Minister in an affluent community. We went on a mission trip to teach vacation bible school and guitar to children on the Navajo Reservation in Southern Utah. We flew into Phoenix and rented a car. We went horseback riding in the Grand Canyon and experienced Native American Dance. We traveled to Bluff, Utah and stayed at the mission. The next morning two of the youth were complaining that they had to share a bathroom. I was apologizing for the inconvenience when a seven year old girl walked into the mission with her five year old sister. I asked her where her mother was and how she had gotten here. I knew that she lived about ten miles away at the reservation, but there were no cars at the mission. She said that she was hungry, and we invited them to eat supper with us. Rita and I drove them home to their trailer. The girl told me that her mom was in jail and her grandfather, who lived next door, was not feeling well. I left her at her house, but felt uneasy. My youth kids got to see a level of poverty that they had never seen before. These children could go a whole day without any food to eat, they had no electricity or running water. We had a wonderful week and in the past twenty years, I have watched her grow up into a fine young woman. She now teaches the Sunday school classes at the church. The kids on the reservation seem happy with their lives and their culture, while many of our youth complained about the most trivial things.

On the surface today's Gospel is about fairness. The landowner hires workers early in the morning and agrees to pay them a full day's wage. He goes back in the early morning and hires more workers. At midday and in the afternoon he hires more workers. Even at the eleventh hour, he hires more workers. The landowner asks the steward to pay all the workers the same wage beginning with the ones that only worked for an hour. When the steward finally began to pay the ones who had worked all day, they were fuming mad. The fact is that we can be easily annoyed with trivial matters that we deem as unfair. Jesus gives us a prime example. The laborers in today's Gospel got paid one day's work, regardless of how long they worked. Those workers who worked the longest earned a fair wage, but they were upset by what the others received.

God turns our world upside down. Jesus is creating a community where the last are first and the first are last. The world isn't fair and maybe God helps to even things out a little. Have you ever felt God's generosity when it is unearned and

undeserved? When the generosity of God exceeds our expectations, we are surprised in a way that fills our heart with the peace that passes all understanding. When you understand life to be an incredible gift, God's grace and mercy flows over you like a river. Jesus is teaching parables that turn our world upside down. Suddenly, everyone is eligible for God's love, not just the outwardly religious ones. The workers that were hired late in the day might have needed money to buy food for their families. When they received their pay at the end of the day, they must have been elated. "Maybe this is the break I have been waiting for," says the unemployed person trying to get back in the work force. "Finally," says the kid who is looking for a table of friends to sit with at a new school. Someone shows up with cases of water after a hurricane because someone half way around the world heard their cry while praying to God.

Have you ever felt blessed by God? When we receive our fair wage it feels right, but when we receive more than we deserve, it is a blessing from God. I give to this church because God has blessed me in so many ways. I receive blessing upon blessing. They just keep coming. I am blessed by my beautiful children, my lovely wife, my mom, my brothers, my friends, this parish, my home. The list goes on and on for me. I love my ministry and my call to St. John's. Today is my third anniversary of serving at St. John's. I pray that God will bless me with many more. I give praise and thanksgiving to God every chance I get. This week at our vestry meeting, our vestry was almost giddy about our budget this for this year and for 2018. Certain Prosperity Televangelists say that we will be given blessings if we tithe their church.

**But the truth is, God blesses us to become a blessing to others.**

When we give out of our abundance, God makes our tithe a blessing to others. Instead of figuring out how we are going to pay our bills, the vestry discussed ministry to others. How can our ECW and individuals help the people hurt by the earthquake and hurricanes? How can we increase our ministry to children and youth? How can we do more ministry in HIHI and the Thrift Shop?

Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, gave hope to the forsaken, forgiveness to the sinner, and spoke to the very least of people. The Kingdom of God is not meant to be fair. But isn't it a comfort to know that Jesus will be there if we stumble or fall? God's mercy and generosity are so far beyond our comprehension that we can scarcely even imagine God's love for us. "Thank God," says the lonely man in the nursing home, when a LEM from his church brings him communion. A cup of cold water, a kind word, a bag of cloths for 10 dollars, a few new books, a hot meal, and a roof over your head are all things that are given to people in need. In a few

weeks, the ECW will hold our annual Harvest Fair and the proceeds will go to those in need and charities in our community. My hope is that every member in this congregation will help out. Will you join them by helping us help others?

Paul said to live is Christ. To me living means sharing God's love with others. We come to church to Praise and Thank God for the blessings that we have received and to give back to others. There is nothing more important in a Christian community than how we treat one another. Even if we are in a hurry, we disagree, or we don't think things are fair, we need to love one another as Christ loved us. This week the Episcopal Church sent an open letter to the leaders of our country. They asked that we take care of the dreamers. Those young people that were brought to this country as children and have now received college degrees and jobs and want to become citizens of this blessed country. I know that politics can argue on two sides of this issue, but in my opinion the truth is found in the bible: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). For Paul living meant seeing communities grow the joy in their hearts. We should walk around as giddy as our vestry with big smiles on our faces. We are so blessed in this community and at St. John's. Paul began as a persecutor of Christians, but near the end of his life his heart was so filled with the love of God, that he spread the Good News as far as he could. Paul truly understood the breadth of God's love and mercy. Let's witness to others the blessings we receive through the love of Christ. Today's Gospel is not about fairness, it is about grace. It is about the unearned abundant life we receive simply because we are all loved by God.

We fight for racial reconciliation because we believe that all people are created equal and that all people have equal rights. Thomas Jefferson didn't just make that up himself, he understood the truth through reading scripture. He knew that these rights were given to us by our creator. God created us in God's own image out of love. God sent Jesus to live and die as one of us that we might know this love and make this love known to others. When the fire and passion of God's love for us fills our heart, our response is to pass that love back to God and to our neighbor. May we all see that we are precious in the sight of God. May we respond to the needs of one another through self-giving love. May St. John's always be a community that knows the love of God and shares that love with our neighbor. Amen.