

Sunday, September 20, 2020, XVI after Pentecost Proper 19, Year A

Introduction

Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables in which Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of day they began to work. When God changes God's mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and eternal God, you show perpetual lovingkindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. Open our | hearts, O Lord,* to give heed to what is said | by your Son. *Alleluia.*

Readings and Psalm

[Jonah 3:10--4:11](#)

God's concern for the city of Nineveh

[Psalm 145:1-8](#)

The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (*Ps. 145:8*)

[Matthew 20:1-16](#)

The parable of the vineyard workers

First Reading: Jonah 3:10--4:11

After Jonah's short sermon in 3:4, the Ninevites all repented and God decided to spare the city. Jonah objected to this and became even more angry when God ordered a worm to destroy a plant that was providing shade. The book ends with a question that challenges any who are not ready to forgive: You, Jonah, are all worked up about a bush, but shouldn't I be concerned about a hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites?

¹⁰When God saw what [the people of Ninevah] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

^{4:1}But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and

merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. ³And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” ⁵Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

⁶The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

⁹But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

A The Word of the Lord.

C THANKS BE TO GOD.

Psalm: Psalm 145:1-8

The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (Ps. 145:8)

¹I will exalt you, my God and king,
and bless your name forever and ever.

²Every day will I bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.

³Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised!
There is no end to your greatness.

⁴One generation shall praise your works to another
and shall declare your power.

⁵I will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty
and all your marvelous works.

⁶They shall tell of the might of your wondrous acts,
and I will recount your greatness.

⁷They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness;
they shall sing joyfully of your righteousness.

⁸The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus tells a parable about God's generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Prayers of Intercession

When I say, “Lord, in your mercy,” you respond, “**Hear our prayer.**”

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence is held as we gather our prayers.

Generous God, you make the last first, and the first last. Where this gospel challenges the church, equip it for its works of service. Strengthen those who suffer for Christ.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Sun and wind, bushes and worms, cattle and great cities—nothing in creation is outside your concern, Almighty God. In your mercy, tend to it all. Give us a spirit of generosity toward all that you have made.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Where we find envy and create enemies, you provide enough for all. Bring peace to places of conflict and violence. Inspire leaders with creativity and wisdom. Bless the work of negotiators, peacekeepers, and development workers.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Reveal yourself to all in need as you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, ready to relent from punishing. Accompany judges and lawyers, victims of crime and those serving sentences. Give fruitful labor and a livelihood to all who seek work.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Even beyond our expectations, you choose to give generously. Grant life, health, and courage to all who are in need.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Our ordinary gifts seem small when we stand in your presence.

Multiply the gifts we are able to offer to make them abundant, not merely enough, that you may be seen through us.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Hear now the prayers of our hearts as we offer them before you both silently and aloud:

Silence for the prayers of people's hearts

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We praise you for the generations before us who have shaped our faith. Give us faithfulness to follow them, living for Christ, until you call us to join them in the joyful song around his throne.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Blessing

The LORD bless you and keep you.

The LORD's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The LORD look upon you with favor and [little cross here] give you peace.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.

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Prayers adapted by Interim Pastor Janet S. Peterman

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