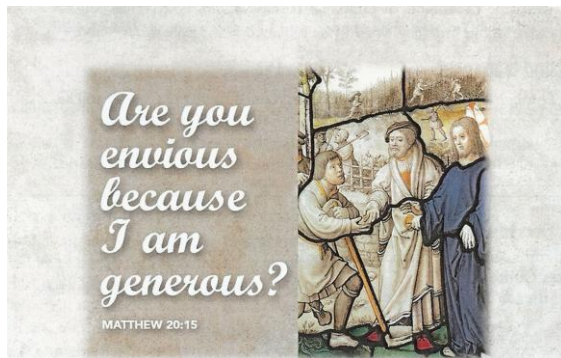


Sunday, September 20, 2020
Pentecost 16
Grace Lutheran Church
Somers Point, NJ 08244
Interim Pastor: Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf
“God's Continuous Insistence”



Mark Twain said this about Scripture, "Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are the ones I *do* understand."

Today's Gospel is not about a random act of kindness I think. I just learned about the "fish chair story." A woman saw this bright colorful crafted fish chair on the internet and had to get a tattoo

of it. She showed her prized tattoo on the internet. Women who saw this were amazed and connected with each other. They decided together to buy this chair and give it to the tattooed woman. They started a go fund me site and after raising \$600 they purchased the fish chair in Baltimore, MD. Then each took turns to deliver it to the woman in Syracuse NY. When it arrived the woman was surprised and grateful by this random act of kindness. She said she didn't need a chair; nevertheless, the kindness of strangers brought together by her story was priceless. This is an act of generosity. This is an act of kindness. Today's gospel offers more.

The kingdom of heaven is like an owner of a vineyard who goes out and hires laborers five times throughout the day. Dawn, 9 o'clock, noon, 3 o'clock, and 5 o'clock, the multiple attempts by the owner to find laborers - mimic what theologian and philosopher John Caputo calls the "insistence of God." God's continuing insistence on the well being of creation constitutes an invitation for humans to practice hospitality and mutual concern. God's call is not coercive or forceful, just as the workers in the parable are not violently compelled to enter the vineyard. I remembered three constants: change, choice, and principles. The workers had a choice. The insistence of God is generous and kind and is offered at all times to those who seek to enter God's kingdom.

David Frey, a Benedictine oblate, works as a Postal Clerk in Massachusetts, writes, "it does seem unfair that the owner of the vineyard not only welcomes but pays idlers and latecomers the same wage that those who worked in the vineyard all day long received...and if the kingdom of heaven is like this, what does that mean? It means I, too, am welcomed into the vineyard. There's work to do, certainly, and there's Grace - which has nothing to do with how much I work. God does this for you and me.

Thanks be to God for this “daily” abundant gratuitous Grace!

“Daily” this adjective is found four times in Matthew's Gospel, in the Lord's Prayer (6:11), and three times in this parable. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to ask only for our “daily bread.” Martin Luther clarified, "in fact God gives daily bread without our prayer even to evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and receive it with thanksgiving. We are not to ask for more than we need, but enough to see us through that day. We trust in God's providence to produce again for what we will require tomorrow. We are encouraged to say our daily prayers. God longs to know each of us on an intimate basis. That involves taking time for frequent conversation. Goodness grows because it is fed by God. Generosity grows because it is fed by God. Gratitude grows because it is fed by God. God invites you to more insistently than what you already have! Amen.