

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

I was the oldest of four kids, the first grandchild on either side of my family. It was pretty cool, being the leader in all our games, being the one my brothers, sister and cousins would turn to when looking for an adventure or a story on a rainy or snowy day. If you were an oldest child, you can probably relate. I was first to get an allowance, first to drive, first to date, first to get married, first to become a father, well, you get the idea, lots of firsts, especially in privileges. Of course I also had responsibilities, but they weren't what I'd call onerous.

Now I don't know if my siblings got away with more than I did, I don't know if they had more freedom, more privileges, and I guess it never mattered to me because I was married and gone before anyone else had even graduated high school. Being first, being oldest was great! I don't think I ever once worried about whether or not the way I was treated was fair, it never crossed my mind, I was oldest, I was first, of course I got more than everyone else. How could it not be fair?

And now we have our gospel! It seems to me Jesus wasn't too concerned about what was fair or unfair, at least not as we look at fairness and unfairness. As usual, Jesus turns everything upside down, showing us that God's values aren't the same as our values. Jesus upsets our views of what is fair and what isn't fair, showing us that what is often of great importance to us, is not important to God. In this parable, we again see that we are of great value to God, but not because of anything we've done, or not done. It's not a case of how well we do in life, the status we've achieved, the positions and the prestige that we've held, frankly, none of that matters at all where God is concerned.

We, created in God's image, have great worth because God loves us. It's that simple. God's love for us goes beyond fairness, unfairness, all human standards. God's love for us changes reality, it changes our standards, it takes all we know and value and turns everything upside down. And our Lord wants us to know that it is a privilege to work and serve in the kingdom of God, it is this that gives true meaning and depth to our lives, to know that we are part of God's work empowers and emboldens us.

The laborers in the vineyard of Jesus' parable worked for the same pay, whether they worked all day or only in the last hour, and Jesus wants us to understand that we also work for the same pay (so to speak) whether we work all day or only in the last hour. The point is we should each of us concentrate on our walk with Jesus, without comparing what we've done (or not done) to that which others have done, because it is not that which gives us our worth. As I said earlier, our worth, our value, is the love of God. What we do in this life in working in God's vineyard is what gives meaning to our lives, it is that which is truly the abundant life. It's not about getting what we deserve, it's about getting what we don't deserve! And for me, this is one of the main points of our gospel this morning, loved, forgiven, saved, and to be able to work in the kingdom, for the kingdom, is continuing evidence of God's outrageous grace, as are the baptisms you witnessed this morning, the meal we

about to share, Grace in the here and now! Not to earn the wage, not to earn the reward, not to justify the wage or the reward, because that is not what is about. Sharing and living the gospel of Christ. God's grace at work. And this leads me to another point about this gospel. I cannot be envious of God's generosity. Instead I am grateful for it. I am grateful for it because I, like you, am a recipient of it. Saved by God's outrageous grace through faith, privileged to live here and now for the gospel of Christ. Last Sunday, you heard about God's abundant love. In the baptisms you witnessed a short time ago, you saw God's abundant love. Now hear about God's outrageous grace, grace to live for the gospel of Christ, grace to live eternally because of it. It is just plain outrageous! AMEN