

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
September 20, 2020 16th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A
Jonah 3:10—4:11; Matthew 20:1-16

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

This fall we are learning what it is to be God's people, followers of Jesus—the Church, with a capital C. A couple of weeks ago Paul admonished us to love our neighbors as ourselves and Jesus explained a way for us to work toward reconciliation in times trouble.

Last Sunday, we were commended to take on forgiveness as a way of living in community, and reserving our judgments about how others live out their faith so that Christ remains at the center of our life as God's people.

The lesson for us this week builds upon these others, and it has to do with keeping a new perspective—God's perspective.

Poor Jonah. God sent him to the evil city of Nineveh to bring God's word to them, calling them to repent of their sinfulness and turn to God. But Jonah didn't want to go. He saw no value in those people, and could not imagine that they would change their ways, let alone their attitude toward God.

Does that sound familiar? These days our world categorizes people into good or bad, right or wrong. And even though we would like "those other people" to change their minds—and think like us, by the way—we hold out little hope or expectation that they can, or that they would even listen to us.

Jonah is a man of faith. He knows God and God's nature as well as any mortal could. He knows that running from God is a bad idea. He knows that it's his own disobedience that caused the storm on the sea. He knows that if HE repents and cries out to God that God will save him from the belly of the fish. Because...he knows that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and is always willing to embrace His sinful children rather than punish them.

And that's what really bugs Jonah about God. He didn't want God to forgive the Ninevites. They didn't deserve it, in his mind. If a fish could swallow Jonah, why not send a meteor down and destroy the whole of Nineveh and be done with them?

Because, Jonah knows—as do we—that there is another way. Humanity creates divisions between those who are pro or con, good or bad, right or wrong, us or them. As God's holy and beloved people, we are called to see a third way—God's way.

It is a way of seeing possibility for renewal and new life. It is a way of seeing from the perspective of those who are hopeless, who have no experience with God's life-giving ways. It is a way of rejoicing with those who receive what they need without comparing them to ourselves.

This is also the lesson Jesus is trying to teach us in the parable today. All of the laborers were in the same situation. They all needed to work to support their families. They all needed the daily wage. We could speculate about the details of why some were hired at the

beginning of the day and some later on, but they all were at the marketplace looking for work.

It is not up to any of the laborers to determine who should earn more or less. In this parable, the landowner sees the need for all those he hires and gives according to that need rather than according to our human systems of wages earned per hours worked.

I don't think this story means that we should throw out our economic systems. What it can teach us, though, is to reflect on the systems we have in place to see if they are just.

This means looking deeper than the headlines of the day or the sound bites on the current campaign ads. It means noticing those on the sidelines, those without a voice, those who are longing for some good news. It means recognizing our own negative attitudes and reactions to the trouble in the world so that we can open our hearts to the compassion and generosity of our loving God.

We are the Church, the body of Christ, sent to bring good news to a world in need of hope for new life. We are called to see the world from God's perspective, a perspective of grace and mercy. As we rely on God to be slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness toward us, can we offer these same gifts to others?

This Christian calling is not easy. That's why we come together to remember who God is for us and who we are together as God's chosen and beloved people. We have been given an amazing gift to share with the world. May we as Christ's Church stand up and proclaim the gift of God's mercy and grace to a world in need of healing and hope.

Thanks be to God! Amen

Prayers of Intercession

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

A brief silence.

Generous God, you make the last first, and the first last. Give resources and courage to the churches around the globe that have few resources. We give thanks for Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Disaster Response who serve as our presence in places of devastation.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Sun and wind, bushes and worms, cattle and great cities—nothing in creation is outside your concern, mighty God. In your mercy, tend to it all, especially where wildfires rage and tropical storms flood the earth. Give us a spirit of generosity toward all you have made.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Where we find envy and create enemies, you provide enough for all. Bless the work of negotiators, peacekeepers, and development workers. Enlighten our nation, the nations we call friends, and the nations that are deemed our enemies. Keep our election season from dishonesty. 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 those seeking 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, especially those listed in our bulletin and those we name now in our hearts. *wait*

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We praise you for the generations that have declared your power to us. Grant comfort and reassurance to the elders in our congregation, especially those who have been separated from loved one for several months. Give us faithfulness to follow them, living for Christ, until you call us all 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.