

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 17th Sunday After Pentecost - September 20, 2026

00:00

We're off to a late start because the pastor saw people that he hasn't seen in a while or got to meet some new people and

00:14

and got a little carried away.

00:16

So I guess as maybe recompense, I should preach extra.

00:21

(audience laughing)

00:22

I'm glad you're at least laughing.

00:26

But no, we'll be fine.

00:30

Our worship today, we will be using as we prepare

00:32

for our 150th anniversary next week,

00:36

our communion setting particularly will be in this booklet

00:42

and the name of the service is called Now the Feast and Celebration.

00:47

The guide to worship is valuable in that.

00:50

It will tell you page by page where we are in the service.

00:54

Many of our hymns, however, and I don't think this will be too unwieldy, but will be in

01:00
the larger book.

01:03
And also, yes, the hymns will be here.

01:09
Wonderful.

01:15
Good morning.

01:18
The pastor is slow in getting started, so as we gather, I might make a comment that during

01:27
this season of Pentecost, we emphasize things that happen in Jesus' life as being important

01:34
for informing the life of the church.

01:37
And today, we'll spend a little time being scandalized about God's generosity and God's mercy.

02:41
The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 20th chapter. Glory to you, oh Lord. Jesus

02:50
said to the disciples, "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in

02:58
the morning to hire labourers in his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius

03:04
for the day, he sent them to work in his vineyard. When he went out at about 9 o'clock, he saw

03:11

others standing idle in the market place and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard

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and I will pay you whatever's right." So they went. When he went out again at about noon

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and 3 o'clock, he did the same. At about 5 o'clock, he went out and found others standing

03:32

around and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" And they said

03:39

to him, "Because nobody hired us." And he said to them, "Well, you also go into the

03:47

vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to the manager, "Call

03:53

the laborers. Give them their pay, beginning with the last, and then going

03:58

to the first. When those hired about five o'clock arrived, each of them received a denarius.

04:06

And when the first came, oh, they thought they would receive more, but each of them

04:10

received a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowners saying,

04:19

"Well, these last worked for only an hour, and you've made them equal to us who have

04:23

born the burden of the day and the scorching heat?

04:29

But the householder replied, friend,

04:33

I'm doing you no wrong.

04:35

Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

04:39

Take what you have, what belongs to you, and go.

04:43

I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.

04:48

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

04:54

Or are you envious because I am generous?

05:00

So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

05:05

The Gospel of our Lord.

05:10

Won't you be seated.

The Sermon

05:20

So if we were to give you a nickel for every time a kid in your life said, "It's not fair,"

05:31

you'd be pretty well off, right?

05:33

Because we are hardwired to do things that seem a fair exchange.

05:41

It's just who we are.

05:45

A bit of a story about that.

05:49

It's true, but it's old, this story.

05:52

Some 40 years back, a young man named TJ was in an introduction to communication class.

06:00

TJ was a bit rough around the edges, but a really good kid.

06:06

This was not an easy class.

06:09

He worked really, really hard.

06:13

Well the task master of a teacher decided that their final exam should be a little speech

06:18

given to persuade.

06:22

TJ was there.

06:24

He had note cards in order.

06:28

He wore a suit tie.

06:30

He was ready.

06:33

And there was a distinguished looking person sitting next to him.

06:38

instructor got kind of the wrong end of the stick. Oh, would you introduce to me

06:45

your guest that you brought because you're so invested in this speech and

06:50

TJ says to me, "I don't know who this is. I've never seen her in my life." So, mopping a

07:01

little egg off, "Well, nice to meet you and who are you? I'm enrolled in this

07:07

class. It's the last day. You're hoping for a grade, are you? So when she received an

07:19

A like every -- no, that didn't happen. Could you imagine TJ coming to my office if that

07:25

had happened? That would not be good. It wouldn't have been fair. We would have been scandalized.

07:37

Just as we are when we read this gospel today, this parable that Jesus tells.

07:46

In confirmation classes back when, we used to take a Bible passage and ask people to write like a news

07:54

headline for it as if it were these days an online article. Back then it was newspapers.

08:03

Well, here's mine. Landowner lavishly generous, like it or lump it. Well most of us are in

08:19

the lumping category if we're honest and that does reveal a little something

unflattering

08:24

about us, but bear with me. There are all kinds of stories. This one, the story of

08:33

Jonah. His beef with God is that God would be merciful to people that he

08:38

thinks really should get a lot of smiting. And then there's that story. The

08:45

one about the faithful son, the waiting father, and the wastrel who goes off and

08:53

squanders an inheritance that by law he shouldn't have even had yet. Well he

08:59

shows up doesn't he? What do we do with this? Well the waiting fathers exuberant

09:08

over-the-top undignified welcome. Well it grinds our gears. But in each of those

09:16

three stories there's something interesting going on. In each one there's

09:22

question and we are left hanging. Okay then, does God get to be merciful to

09:31

whomever God chooses? Or if we're there on the porch and the party's inside and

09:41

the father is invited us in, so are you going to join the party or are you going

09:46

to stand out here and pout. Your choice.

09:54

I think it's okay that the church is scandalized about God's mercy extending to everybody.

10:02

I think this whole merit system, that's kind of our own stuff, isn't it?

10:08

So it's helpful to really focus on this householder in the parable.

10:16

Even more than in today's world, in this world, this world that Jesus lives in, people with

10:26

power could do whatever they wanted.

10:29

There was a marquee sign on the muffler shop in my hometown that had this message, and

10:40

This memory is about 55 years old if I tell the truth.

10:44

The golden rule, them that gets the rules, it said.

10:51

This was holder could do whatever he wants.

10:56

And we know how that world works.

11:01

If we dive back into a couple of scripture stories, remember John the Baptist?

11:05

Herod, he could do what he wanted, and he did to his critics.

11:12

Some of you are nodding like, "Oh yeah, I know that story."

11:15

That's the one you don't tell at breakfast because it's just a little too grisly.

11:19

Or there's King Henry II, "Who will deliver me from this obnoxious archbishop?"

11:28

All he had to do was say it out loud and the knights were dispatched to end.

11:33

Thomas Beckett said, "Archbishop, that's kind of what we expect in the world.

11:40

We don't expect pay packets of equal thickness for people who work an hour or who work eight

11:47

hours or more."

11:51

There's a bit of oscillating that happens.

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It's a Lutheran thing maybe.

11:57

We talk about this tension between what is called the law and the gospel, the law being

12:02

that where we're broken, the gospel being where God repairs, well so far broken as

12:10

shows up in church. Oh no, I'm serious. Think about what our interpretation is

12:17

of those people hired last. Well, those slackers. How do we know? We don't. Maybe

12:32

because of a disability, advanced age, maybe they're not from around here, maybe

12:38

they don't speak the language, maybe they don't have the proper papers, I don't know,

12:45

we don't know, but our assumptions reveal a little bit about us don't they? And what

12:55

What is the householder's response?

12:59

Oh, nobody hired you?

13:01

I will.

13:02

Even if for an hour, I'll make sure you get your daily bread.

13:14

The householder does what the householder does because it's who he is.

13:22

to mind another story that some of you have heard, I think, about a man at the

13:27

River Ganges and there's this swirling eddy that has trapped a scorpion. I'm

13:33

looking to see if anybody... you heard this story? Oh good, I'll tell it like I've

13:38

never told it before. It's a good one though. So this scorpion is trapped and

13:44

the man decides the scorpion needs saving. So he reaches in so many times

13:49

that the scorpion has repeatedly stung, has drawn blood, raised welts, and of

13:56

course the people in the comment section, so to speak, their critique is, well you

14:03

dope, let the scorpion to its own fate and save your own self, why don't you? And the

14:13

man's reply was, "Just because it is the nature of the scorpion distinct, I'm not

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surrendering my nature to rescue and save."

14:27

Sounds a bit like a guy who would say something like, "Are you envious because

14:33

I'm generous?"

14:38

I think we're getting a glimpse of God's Commonwealth here.

14:44

And may it be that our instinctive grumbling about scandalous generosity will give way to

14:53

joyous, raucous laughter that there could be somebody so generous.

15:05

Amen.