

## **Pentecost 17 – A -09/24/2023**

It is so easy to plan out how something should happen. Often we don't consider all of the variables. When we work with one or more people other than ourselves, there will be different approaches. Each one of us processes differently. All of us have different skill sets and experience.

Yet as human beings we have our set of expectations that we think are the right way to accomplish something. What have we learned and experienced about our expectations? The more set-in stone our expectations, the more disappointments and frustration that we may experience.

So often we want someone to do something differently than they have ever done it before. When it doesn't happen, the way we want it to, we become frustrated and irritated with the person. In reality, we have set ourselves up for failure.

It says that we have not paid attention to this person to see how they work, how they process. We have not really listened to them and considered their skill sets and experience. I'm not trying to place judgement on the other person as they are who they are.

The healthy way of getting something accomplished is guiding the process to the completion of the desired task. For me part of the fun is to experience other people and their way of thinking and processing. How we actually get there is not as important as the participation and the richness of what people bring to the table.

In our Gospel lesson today, the landowner had a task that needed to be accomplished, work done in the vineyard. He went out and collected workers throughout the day. He was very clear on his expectations and their pay. The workers also had their expectations.

When the workers first heard what was expected and their pay, they agreed to it. One scholar has said that every parable has an absurdity to it. The absurdity in this parable is the fact that at the end of the day everyone got paid the same amount. It didn't make any difference if they had worked an hour or two or all day. The absurdity is what is begging us to really listen to what Jesus is saying.

Originally, everyone had agreed on the wages, but when it came to receiving their pay, those who had worked more hours, of course wanted more pay. This is not what they had agreed to. It didn't seem fair that those who had worked less got the same pay as everyone else.

Now, I myself am just as comfortable being up here or in the back row or at an instrument or singing in the choir. It doesn't make me any better or less than any of you. The point is every one of us is important in God's eyes. In the end we all

receive what Jesus promised, forgiveness, salvation and new life. This is the gift and not the payment for what we do.

God in Jesus Christ promised the same to everyone regardless of what we do or don't do. So then why do anything if the promise is already there? We are asked to do it out of thankfulness for what we have been promised. Jesus always carries through on what he has promised.

In this respect this is like the landowner, as he followed through on what he had promised. The workers who had worked more hours changed their expectations when they felt that they were entitled to more wages. I believe we have a whole different way of thinking and acting when we feel entitled.

Entitlement blinds us from seeing the generosity of God in Jesus Christ. In the end the workers in the vineyard received their wages and most likely had enough to take care of their families for that day. This was what their first expectation was.

I believe that we can see more clearly when we look through the eyes of generosity rather than entitlement. We are taught through scripture that we do not own anything, that everything belongs to God, and we are the caretakers. This is not the way our culture thinks and promotes.

In our second reading for today, we find Paul in prison. I can imagine this is not what he expected. He expected to get back to Phillipi and continue building the church. He adjusted to his new setting and didn't want it to get in the way of the church's growth in Phillipi. Thus, he chose to write a letter to encourage the Philippians to continue in their faith.

Paul was saying no matter what our setting is, what is most important is growing in Christ. Just because he cannot be with them does not mean that Christ is not with them. Christ's generosity does not stop because they are not together. Christ's promise of forgiveness, salvation and new life is still the same.

Paul was concerned that the expectations that the Philippians had of him being with them to grow in their individual and corporate faith should not get in the way of their growth as followers of Christ. He tried to encourage them so as not to get stuck in this expectation as he did not know when they would be together again.

Paul says<sup>27</sup> Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,<sup>28</sup> and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is

evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. <sup>29</sup>For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—<sup>30</sup>since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

It is so easy to get stuck in our expectations that we forget about the outcome of a plan. For Christians, the final plan being that eventually we will go home to be with God in Jesus Christ. In the meantime, while we are living here on earth we are called to practice kingdom living.

Kingdom living today is remembering that we have a generous God who offers us freely forgiveness, salvation and new life. This is a gift not an entitlement or wages for what we do. Kingdom living is about living for Christ and not ourselves.

Paul reminds us today that living for Christ is about putting Christ first. In doing this we are promised to have what we need to live. When we start getting into entitlement as our society teaches we can lose sight of what we already have. What do we expect from others and from ourselves?

We are called to check out our expectations, are they for our gain or Christ's gain? Whose plan are we trying to follow?

As absurd as it was the landowner stuck to what he had promised. Jesus does the same. We, along with the workers, as human beings can easily get into the entitlement mode instead of the generosity mode and change our expectations.

In kingdom living we are called to live in the generosity mode which helps us to see more clearly what Jesus wants us to see. It more fully allows us to live for Christ. It allows us to better keep our expectations consistent and in line with Christ.

Remember as Paul says we are all in this struggle together to follow Christ and grow in our faith. It's not about how much we do, but that we are called to serve graciously.