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"Fair"

Exodus 16:2-18 Matthew 20:1-16 Phillipians 1:21-30

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 16:2-16

In this morning's OT lesson, the Israelites had been on the receiving end of God's marvelous miracles to deliver them from bondage. Once the euphoria of deliverance died down something else rose up--complaints. Surprisingly, the Lord answered. Hear the word of God from Exodus 16.

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 20:1-16

All's fair in \_\_\_\_\_. Sometime, though, life isn't fair even if you're in love and especially if you're at war. Jesus told a story to illustrate the difference between the world's fairness and God's fairness. Jesus draws a radical distinction between the way this world is expected to operate and the way that God operates. In this world, people have a right to a fair wage but in the God's world whatever we receive is an undeserved gift. Read Matthew 20:1-16

Let us pray. Lord this is a tough one for us. We have grown up on the Protestant work ethic of equal pay for equal work. We don't like it when we feel slighted. We grumble when things don't seem fair. Help us through this part of your Word to gain a greater understanding of your Grace for us. Bless to our heads, our hearts, our minds, our souls and our spirit's the reading of this your holy Word. Amen.

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Well we're still here. The world didn't end yesterday. Numerologist Davie Meade predicted that a mysterious planet, Planet X or Nibiru was going to enter our solar system and either crash into earth and obliterate it or pass by and miss but still pull earth off its axis and cause unimaginable chaos. He predicted this from number codes in the Bible and a "date marker" on the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. Fortunately, the planet that doesn't exist missed us.

The truth is, though we need to live as if tomorrow never comes for us. None of us is guaranteed another day. Like I said last week, we are to live one day at a time. Yesterday the world did not come to an end, but any day our world could.

One of my favorite "man dies and goes to heaven jokes" is the one about the man who and finds himself at the Pearly Gates at the entrance to heaven. I think I may have told this before. Here goes.

A man dies and goes to heaven and of course, St. Peter is there to meet him. St. Peter says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."

"Okay," the man says. "Well, I was married to the same women for 50 years and never cheated on her, not even in my heart."

That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth three points."

Three points?" He says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service."

Terrific!" says St. Peter. "That's certainly worth a point."

"One point? Well I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans."

Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says.

"Two points!" The man cries. "At this rate the only way I'll get into heaven is by the grace of God!"

St. Peter smiled and said, "That's 94 points! Come on in!"

Some of us may amass as much as 6 points through our efforts and faithfulness on earth. Some of us may only amass 3 points and some of us like Mother Teresa may amass as many as 9. But the point is that none of us will ever be able to amass enough points to earn our own way into heaven. It's only by God's grace that we can be saved. It is by GRACE through FAITH that we are saved lest anyone could boast.

Like the parable that Jesus told, some of us may have been a part of the family of God from day one. Some of us may have come later into the family. Some of us may take a break in the middle of our lives only to come back later and finish well. The point is that everyone gets equal treatment at the foot of the cross. It takes the same amount of grace to save a former Hell's Angel as it does to save an Anaheim Angel or a Victoria Secret Angel.

Once there was a truck driver, just a little guy, who had parked his semi at the highway cafe and had gone in for lunch. While he was sitting there perched on a stool, three burly Hell's Angels came in and began picking on him, grabbed his food away and laughed in his face. The truck driver said nothing, got up, paid for his food and walked out. One of the cyclists laughed to the waitress, "Boy, he sure wasn't much of a man, was he?" The waitress replied, "No, I guess not. He's not much of a truck driver, either," she said pointing out the window. "He just ran over three motorcycles."☺

Maybe you're heard the expression, "there but for the grace of God go I." When it came to Hurricane Harvey it was more like "there but for the luck of the draw go I." Some lost everything. Some didn't. All of us are still in shock. Those who were affected are experiencing survivor's shock- glad they survived even though their possessions didn't and their houses were hit. Those who weren't affected at all may be experiencing survivor's guilt.—why was I spared?

Sometimes, according to this innate sense of fairness we have within us, life just isn't fair. It's one of the hard realities we learn early on. No one has to wait for adolescence or old age to find it out. You can learn it in nursery school. Little

brothers and sisters seem to get special privileges. It's the way older employees feel when young hot shots come into the workplace at higher pay than those who have been slugging away in the trenches for years. It's the way veteran athletes feel when rookies get drafted with multi-million dollar contracts while the veterans have been slugging it out at smaller salaries for years. Some coaches even treat these rookies differently from the rest, giving them special privileges the way we sometimes do with our children or our employees or our students.

Some handle the unfairness of life by dealing with it directly, some deal with it indirectly. Others try to deal with it by just thinking positively. You know the type. No matter what happens to them, they always see the sunny side of things. Their first thought is, "Surely something good can come out of this. There's got to be a pony somewhere."

They're like the boy who was overheard talking to himself as he strutted across the backyard, bat on his shoulder, and baseball in his hand. Just before pitching the ball in the air he said, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world." Then he tossed the ball in the air, swung and missed and said "Strike one!" Undaunted, he picked up the ball and tossed it up again and said, "I'm the greatest baseball hitter ever," swung and missed a second time and said "Strike two!" He paused a moment to look at the bat and ball carefully and with all the determination and positive mental attitude he could muster, he tossed it up again and said, "I'm the greatest hitter who ever lived," swung the bat hard, but missed it the third time. Immediately he cried out, "Wow! Strike three! What a pitcher! I just struck out the greatest hitter in the world!"

For some, thinking positively works pretty well, at least for a time. Then life deals a blow that really lays them low, so low that it even brings the world's most positive thinkers down. Sometimes the good do die young while the wicked sometimes live long and seemingly happy lives. Sometimes the good get cancer and suffer while the bad are often physically and emotionally healthy. Sometimes the honest and upright do lose their jobs or their businesses, while the cheats and the liars seem to keep theirs.

Sometimes life is so unfair that not even positive thinking can overcome it. Try telling someone who's living on the street or someone who's loved one has just committed suicide because she can't take the cancer or the depression any more. Try telling folks who have lost their homes and maybe even their family to JUST think positively.

Back when hurricane Katrina hit I had to go to my mom's doctor to go get a special cream she needed. My mom had lost her right leg to diabetes and she had prosthesis she named Artie as in Artificial. Is it a coincidence that my right knee is Artie 2? My mom was one of those positive thinkers though. When she came out of surgery she said to the doctor, "Well this will cut my shaving time in half" "She said, "I guess I can get a job at IHOP."

My mom needed this lotion to toughen up her skin so she could use her artificial leg. As I was waiting for the receptionist to be able to take a break and go get the lotion I had to wait in the waiting room. In the waiting room was a boy of about 8 years old who had lost a leg, a man about 70 who had lost a leg, and a man who had lost both arms. He had two hooks that he could open and close. He and his wife were evacuees from New Orleans. Not only had he lost his arms in the storm he had lost his home and a car they left behind that had just been paid for. But they were rejoicing because the company for which she worked had gotten them an apartment here in Houston.

Katrina had dealt them an unfair blow, but they were rejoicing at their little slice of grace called an apartment. They were doing more than thinking positively. They were THANKING positively. There is a power in Positive THANKING.

Sometimes life is so unfair we can't begin to understand it. And that's when we begin to question not just the fairness of life, but some even question God's fairness. But saying life isn't fair is not the same as saying God isn't fair. God is not fair. God is more than fair.

Did you notice in the reading from Exodus how some gathered more manna and some gathered less than them, but those that gathered more had the same as those that gathered less? Did you notice that those that didn't trust that there would be more the next morning and saved some found their hoard rotten in the morning? Did you notice that all of what came was not due to their effort but the provision of God. Did you notice that what was provided came as a result and in spite of their complaints? Was that fair? Or more than fair?

We shouldn't think of God's love lavished on those we might consider to be big time sinners as unfair because God's justice doesn't work the way the world's justice works. When the laborers in Jesus' parable cried out, the master answered the outcry with a straightforward appeal to justice. "Look, you got paid what we agreed on, didn't you?"

God's benevolence does not contradict good contract justice. It goes beyond it and transforms it and in so doing becomes a model for us to be more just and more loving in our relationships with others.

This story is told of Yogi Berra, infamous catcher for the New York Yankees. He also was a manager for the Yankees and the Mets and the Yankees and retired from Managing after 7 years with the Astros in 1992. Yogi was famous for his play behind the plate and coaching. He is also famous for his unique way of stating things like "When you come to a fork in the road, take it. It ain't over till it's over. It's like déjà vu all over again. No one goes there nowadays, it's too crowded. Baseball is 90% mental and the other half is physical. The future ain't what it used to be, and You can observe a lot by just watching."

When the Yankees were at their peak and were negotiating contracts for the next year. A group of reporters interviewed players as they emerged from the owner's office, and one of them asked Yogi Berra about the terms of his contract. In his characteristically, plain-spoken style, he said, "I'm gonna get to play baseball again next year for the Yankees, and would you believe it, they're gonna pay me besides!" That's the spirit of gainful employment, doing what you love to do and do well and getting paid for it besides.

If the workers who'd worked all day in Jesus' parable had Yogi's attitude about their work, they wouldn't have resented those who only "got to work" one hour. God's grace makes us less jealous of latecomers and upstarts in the faith. It makes us less jealous of third world countries which represent now the church of the future and the future of the church. It makes us less jealous of recent immigrants and little sisters who get special treatment.

God's justice arises out of a gracious invitation to use your innate gifts and abilities to the glory of God and to the benefit of others. In the long run, money or recognition or praise has little to do with it.

After serving as a missionary for forty years in Africa, Henry C. Morrison became sick and had to return to America. As the great ocean liner docked in New York Harbor there was a great crowd gathered to welcome home another passenger on that boat. Morrison watched as President Teddy Roosevelt received a grand welcome home party after his African Safari.

Resentment seized Henry Morrison and he turned to God in anger, "I have come back home after all this time and service to the church and there is no one, not even one person here to welcome me home." Then a still small voice came to Morrison and said, "You're not home yet."

In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke Jesus is asked by his disciples about a local travesty... A large part of Jesus disciples were from Galilee and a report came that a number of folks from Galilee had been killed by Pilate. Adding to the travesty was that Pilate had taken their blood and mixed it with the blood of pagan sacrifices. Jesus answered them this way, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No I tell you. But unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Do you think that those who drowned in the flood waters from Hurricane Harvey and Irma and Maria and Jose and the earthquakes in Mexico were worse sinners than those that didn't? To put it another way, do you think that those who survived or those that were not flooded were better people than those that did not? The 18 who lost their lives when the tower of Siloam fell are like those

hundreds that died when the buildings in Mexico fell. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Mother Nature is no respecter of persons. The rain falls upon the just and the unjust just the same. Buildings fall upon the just and the unjust the same.

God's grace is the same for everybody. Since we don't earn it, it comes to us in different ways. To some, like the 6 pointers it doesn't seem so dramatic because they've grown up trying to live the right way all along. To others who haven't done a lot for others who have perhaps wasted nearly their whole lives and come to the vineyard late, the difference is much more dramatic. To some who started out and then took a sabbatical and then came back once they realized what they had been missing to come home is sweet. But the gift of grace is all the same.

That may seem unfair to you, but it's not because God isn't fair. God is MORE than Fair. In Jesus Christ, God took all the unfairness of our lives and our troubled world on himself and suffered the unfairness of death on a cross that we might have life and more abundantly. Now THAT'S WHAT'S NOT FAIR! On the cross JESUS didn't get what He deserved. He got just what WE deserve. He took our sins upon himself on the cross to provide each of us with that that extra 90 something points. That my friends, was not fair....for Jesus. But for us it is far more than ... fair.

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Let's pray, O God, we are so blessed that You not only allow us to be a part of Your Kingdom but You call each of us to serve You with the spiritual gifts You have given us. O God, You are so merciful and gracious to us as You extend to us the offer to enter Your Kingdom whether we come to You early or late in the day. Help us to share Your Love.

God of grace and glory, we thank you that you do not reward us according to our deserving, but favor us with the gift of forgiveness and mercy. Give us a new heart that we might not grumble at the extravagance of your grace but rather rejoice.

There have been devastating blows delivered to our world, not only on our continent but on others as well. More than 1,200 people have died across India, Bangladesh and Nepal as a result of flooding, with 40 million affected by the devastation. The hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose, Maria have brought devastation. We pray for Debby Duffy's family in Puerto Rico.

Hear us as we pray by name for those on our hearts this morning..

We pray in the saving name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.