

Second Sunday of Lent - Matthew 28: 1-10

"Life's Not Fair"

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March 1, 2015

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, MD

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Life is not fair. We are taught that as children, when our older sibling picks on us or when our younger sibling gets away with something we never would. When our friends bring in the newest, fanciest toy for show and tell that our parents won't buy us. It's engrained in us from the start. Life is not fair. As we grow older, we're still reminded of this regularly. At sixteen, our friend's parents get them a car, but we have to walk to work to buy a car ourselves. Our significant other breaks up with us for someone who is "better" or "more popular." We don't get the grade we think we earned on that test. It's not fair. Life is not fair. As we keep growing older, we aren't selected for a job because we don't have enough experience. We are passed over for a promotion because the boss favors someone else... We watch a loved one suffer miserably as they fight cancer or watch our parents struggle to remember who they are, and who we are as they suffer the effects of Alzheimer's disease. We lose someone tragically at a young age in a car accident. Innocent lives are lost each day around the world. About 21,000 lives are lost due to starvation each day, most of which are children.ⁱ We see news stories from around the world of people being beaten and murdered. Innocent people suffering. This is not fair. Life is not fair.

The good news. God is fair. But in our reading today, we don't necessarily hear God as fair. We've heard this story many times. The landowner goes out in the morning around 6am and picks up some workers. While they're working, the landowner goes out again around 9am and picks up some more workers. He does this again, and again, and again at noon, 3pm, and 5pm. Then comes the end of the day, which is around 6pm. We now have

people who have worked 12 hours, 9 hours, 6 hours, 3 hours, and 1 hour. The landowner promised the first workers that they would receive one denarius as payment for their days work. The landowner made no promise to the other workers on how much they would be paid. What would we consider fair payment? Our definition of fair would say that the first workers would get the most. The 9am workers would get a little less. The noon workers a little less than that. The 3pm workers a little less than them. And the 5pm workers to just get a little bit. They only worked one hour. That seems to make sense. The workers should earn the pay that they worked for.

But that is not what happened. The landowner had his manager pay the workers backwards beginning with the last workers. They received one denarius. Then the workers who came at 3pm. They received one denarius. Then came the workers who began at noon. Well, they got one denarius as well. Hmm... The workers who came in at 9am are up next. One denarius for them. Last are the initial workers. The workers who have slaved away in the field for 12 hours. The hot sun is nothing to take lightly. They earned a big pay. The manager must have only given the other workers 1 denarius to save up the rest for the initial workers. After all, they worked the most and deserved the most.

It's their turn. They step up to the manager. And receive one denarius. Just one! This is not fair!! How come those who only worked 1 hour were paid the same as those who worked 12 hours?

Isn't this how our society thinks and feels? If we work more hours, we should get paid more. But what about when fairness doesn't actually happen even in our society? We hear the news stories about the wage gap in women compared to men. On average, women earn 78 cents to every dollar that a man earns in the US.ⁱⁱ Only 14.6% of top executive positions were held by women in Fortune 500 companies.ⁱⁱⁱ The ELCA is one denomination that allows women to even be ordained, but only 24% of the clergy on the ELCA roster are women.^{iv} As I study for ordination, I

know that there will be some churches that my paperwork will never be sent to solely based on the fact that I am a female. I could easily be the 5pm workers. Passed over until a generous landowner finally came back to me and puts me to work. Our society really isn't fair, is it?

Looking back at the story, I don't really think that the first workers were even concerned about fairness at all. They were only concerned about themselves. If they were really concerned about fairness, should they not have spoken up sooner? It wasn't "fair" that the 3pm workers were paid the same as the 5pm workers. But the first workers weren't concerned about that, were they? It wasn't "fair" that the noon workers were paid the same as the 3pm and 5pm workers. But the first workers weren't concerned about that either. Nor was it "fair" when the 9am workers were paid the same as the noon, 3pm, and 5pm workers. But, again, this didn't affect the first workers, and so they didn't care. It wasn't until it was their turn to receive the same pay as the 9am, noon, 3pm, and 5pm workers did that the whole situation became unfair. It wasn't until it affected them that they noticed enough to care and speak up.

Before Lent began, Pastor Alessandri in her sermon asked us to write something down that we were giving up of ourselves to strengthen our relationship with Christ. We could work on giving up a bad habit, our anger, anxiety or fear. Something that was holding us back from being closer with Christ. As we're now on the 2nd Sunday of Lent, I want to lift those up. God calls of us to give of ourselves. To not be like the first workers but to give up our selfishness to speak of the unfairness that may not affect us. But to speak of what is right, and what is just. I have been amazed at the things I've seen each of you do here at Haven. With each project you take on, you are doing just that. Life is not fair that children end up homeless, but you see this unfairness, and you give so that these children have food and possessions of their own. Life is not fair that families in Hagerstown struggle to put food on their tables, but you see this unfairness, and you give to Micah's Backpack and the food bank. Life is not fair that there are people in Hagerstown are left without shelter,

but you see this and you give of your selves to serve at the REACH Cold Weather shelter. Your community garden, your loose change offering, each and every project you do, you are being less and less like the first workers. The work never ends. There are many injustices in today's world. God calls us to speak up and to do, even if they don't affect us personally. To make things more fair for everyone.

There's good and bad news to go with that. We'll go with the bad news first. No matter how much we do, life is still unfair. That doesn't mean we stop doing, but we alone cannot fight all that is unfair and unjust in the world we live in. This is where the good news comes in. Life may be unfair, but God's Kingdom is perfect. This parable is eluding to fairness that is heaven. God's grace is the same for each of us. No matter if we were a disciple walking along side Jesus or a worker who only works an hour in the vineyard. God's love is perfectly fair. We are all equal in God's eyes. And God's kingdom will allow for this equality to be shown. How perfect is that. As we walk with Jesus through this Lenten season and come near to his final days, we remember that through His death and resurrection, we may all enter the Kingdom of God in all its fairness.

Amen.

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ⁱ "Hunger and World Poverty." Poverty.com -. Accessed March 1, 2015. <http://www.poverty.com/>.

ⁱⁱ "America's Women and the Wage Gap." September 1, 2014. Accessed March 1, 2015.

<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "2013 Catalyst Census: Fortune 500 Women Executive Officers and Top Earners." Knowledge Center. December 10, 2013. Accessed March 1, 2015. <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/2013-catalyst-census-fortune-500-women-executive-officers-and-top-earners>.

^{iv} "ELCA Facts." ELCA.org. Accessed March 1, 2015. <http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/ELCA-Facts>.