

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

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But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

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This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

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How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

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How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

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Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

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So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

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God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

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His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

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How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

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Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

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So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

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God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

And so Jesus tells us a story that is designed to appear out of place because it is so necessary to change our thinking when it comes to the grace of God and how we see others. Here's another helpful part of this lesson, instead of looking at how long the workers were laboring, let us fix our eyes on the master. Look at how the master goes out and gathers people to himself. Look at his consistent and gracious action. He goes out early in the morning and issues the call to his vineyard and then continues to do so throughout the day. For in his goodness the Lord desires that many more are brought in, and so goes out and finds those that are lost and hopeless. He finds those that are standing idle and others that have been passed over and he invites them to work in his vineyard. He goes out the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, even in the eleventh hour. The master, that is the LORD God, he goes out and he graciously calls sinners to come into his kingdom and benefit from the gracious reward that he wants to give to all of them. Consider the generous grace of God, consider the heart and compassion, and the desire that God wants all to be saved and be in heaven with him and serve him with purpose and forgiveness now. Consider the gracious ways of our God and dear Christian be challenged and transformed in your thinking and the way that you see others. Look at the master, look at the LORD and Savior who went out and found us and called us into his kingdom. Dear friend, not a one of us had to fill out an application to be brought into his kingdom. The master went out and found us, he called us, and by bringing us into his kingdom, he has placed us in line to receive an eternal reward. No matter if that happened in your first few days in your twilight years or somewhere in between God desires that you would be with him and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For each and every soul is a soul treasured by God - both the lifelong faithful member and the one called back to the Savior's side after years of standing outside of his kingdom.

Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

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His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.

Matthew 20:1-16. *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

God’s Grace Challenges Us!

1. His Generosity Reshapes our Thinking

2. His Goodness Refashions our Lives

His ways are higher than our ways! We hear this sentiment expressed often in times of difficulty and strife. As we struggle to understand why certain things happen, why difficulty comes, and remains, in faith, we may speak these words as we confess our trust that God knows best. We may have uttered such a statement in the wake of recent events. His ways are higher than our ways! We trust God will make even difficulties and troubles work out for the good of those who love him.

Yes, we can speak these words with regard to difficult situations but consider how these words apply to God’s grace and mercy. ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** These words before us today, both in Old Testament Lesson and these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, speak about God’s generous grace. God’s grace is so generous and overwhelming, it is so higher and greater than our thoughts and ways that God’s grace daily reshapes our thinking and it refashions our lives.

And so Jesus tells a story, and this parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) that Jesus tells is a challenging one. After hearing the situation described, we might understand the objection that is given at the end of the story. Workers who are hired last are given the same amount as workers who have worked all day. That doesn’t seem fair! That’s not the way that I

would have done it! Well, that's exactly the point that Jesus is making. God does not treat us as our sins deserve, and he is much more generous and merciful than we tend to be. God's grace is so generous so higher and greater than our ways that it challenges us, as it pushes us to change our thinking and the way that we see others, even the way that we see God.

So let's consider this scenario that Jesus describes and consider how those workers hired first might have viewed those hired later. Imagine working all day in the field, picking rock in the hot sun, pulling weeds, bailing hay, or going about the harvest. Think of how the day would wear on you - on your body and your mind. And as the day stretches on, a few more people are hired to join in the work. At first, that seems helpful. But as the day inches closer to the end, you look over as even more people are hired even though the workday is just about done. In your mind, the new hires seem to saunter in when everything is just about done for the day. They don't even cover an acre, or work for more than an hour or so, and then word comes down that the owner of the land is going to give them the same pay. Not just the same rate, the same total, the same number of zeros on the check, the same reward, the same wage for working for an hour even though you worked all day! How does that work! That's not fair! Surely, those who worked longer should get something extra. This is a scandalous scenario. That's not the way that I would have done it!

But that's exactly the point that Jesus is trying to make when he speaks about the kingdom of God. It is a parable that is meant to challenge our way of thinking about others and even about our God! God is gracious and generous beyond our understanding. Our Savior challenges us with the generosity of God and who God directs his generous grace towards. And that challenge - that pushing and expanding of our understanding of God and his mercy to sinners - is necessary, for our thinking needs to be daily transformed. After all, this kind of generosity is not at all what we are used to in this world. We are trained by what we see and what we experience, which is, the worker gets the wage that corresponds to the work that he or she puts in. That's what we are used to seeing. That's what our minds are trained to expect, so much so, that this kind of thinking affects the way that we look at God and the way that we see and measure others. But God urges us to remember, that His ways are higher than our ways! Those that have been called to faith later in life are just as precious as those he claimed his own from the first hour. Those that are new to the faith are just as precious as those who have been believers or members of this church all their lives. He gives his same gifts of forgiveness and heaven to all those he calls to be his own.

This is an important lesson that Jesus wanted to teach Peter and the rest of the disciples, including us today. After the disciples watched a rich young man refuse to follow Jesus because of his love for earthly possessions, the apostle Peter wondered out loud, ***"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*** Like Peter, we might selfishly wonder, what's in it for us. Jesus responded to Peter's question by telling this parable, but first, he went on to assure his disciples that the Lord would remember their service to him, and the disciples would be blessed eternally. However, Jesus was careful to warn his disciples to avoid the temptation to trust in their service as what saves them or see it as a source or reason to expect extra blessing, because such an emphasis on their work would actually lead them away from him. And so Jesus says with words of warning, *"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

As sinners, it is hard to shake that built-in self-interest that comes with our sinful nature, and so we may be uncomfortable with how Jesus describes the grace of God here and how God expresses the kind of mercy on a life-long believer that he has on the man or woman who has seemingly wasted their whole life. He gives the same reward to a person who was baptized, confirmed, and a leader of a church of his or her life as he does a person who after living a life of immorality believes at the eleventh hour! A certain part of us cringes at that notion because our natural way of thinking is so ingrained in our minds and so hard to shake. Ever since we are young, we are trained in the refrain, "it's not fair!" A sister complains as she points at her brother and complains, "Why should he get the same reward if I did all the cleaning?!" And that sentiment doesn't go away when we grow older but sticks with us as we make the same claim later in life, more often than we probably would like to admit. When we put in a hard day's work and the guy or the gal next to you gets paid the same rate, even though you did all the work, why should she get the same reward?

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Let us rejoice in the fact, that God's ways are higher than our ways! He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but by his grace, we are set apart as his own for this life and the next. Look closely and see it is his work and his effort and his love that saves us and sets us in line for the reward of heaven! Rejoice in the grace of God and give thanks that we are all heirs of eternal life, through his undeserved love. And then rejoice with the new believer who knows that they are just as precious to God as you! Consider how the Lord has called you to faith and how he continually seeks out the lost, and the idle, and the wandering. May that generous grace of God reshape our thinking about others and refashion our lives as we live for God.

I invite each of you to take a moment right now to consider how he has saved you personally. I want you to read your name into the following statements as they apply to you... The Lord has chosen me, not just to save me by the narrowest of margins on the last few moments of my life, but he has called me to live a life of service to him, to participate as long as I can in the work of his kingdom, so that I may live my life to his glory. He has searched me out and found me. He has brought me in, welcomed me, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this purpose, with this motivation that comes from him. From the day I was born again and baptized he has spoken to me about the family business, the blessed task of proclaiming his name in all I say and do. He has placed the tool of his Holy Word in my hands and has shown me had to go about this blessed work. He has connected me with fellow believers and he has given me a place in his kingdom that I can use my talents gifts and abilities. He watches over me and equips me so that I can even grow in my service as I learn more about his love as I consider how I may serve God in other ways. He has watched me since I was young, corrected, instructed, and satisfied me, as he has enlisted me in service to Christ and I am blessed to proclaim his name. Now I am able to share my faith with my spouse, with my children, and with my neighbors. He has called me to proclaim his grace and reflect his love in all that I do as well. And while the days grow long and I may become tired and weary along the way he refreshes me with words of reassurance, and even a special supper, where he feeds and nourishes, strengthens and blesses me, so that I may go out and work in his kingdom with renewed energy and thanksgiving. As I live and labor in his kingdom the Lord speaks his words of reassurance, and at the end of the day, I will be given the reward that was promised to all of us. The gift of eternal life. And all of this is not because I have earned or deserved it, gained some sort of certificate of merit through years of devotion. No, all of this is because he was so devoted to me, that he came and lived in my place, served the will of the master perfectly for me to achieve my salvation, and then suffered the pain, the anguish, and the rejection that my sins deserve. And then he saw to it that he would send his word out to find me so that I might be welcomed into his presence now and forever.

How great is the love of God! With this good news pressed against our foreheads in baptism and played in my ears as we go about our work for him, we are blessed. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us look at the continual love of the father, laid before me as I open his word. Let us by his life-giving meal given to sustain you and me. Let us be lifted up and challenged by the generous grace of my God, to view every soul as precious, just as we know that we are precious to him.

His ways are, indeed, higher than our ways! Rather than treating us as our deeds deserve, our God is so wonderfully abounding in mercy and grace. Why would we question his goodness and generosity?! And yet in our sinfulness, we have a hard time shaking the thoughts and the ways that we are accustomed to! And so may we pray: O Lord, your ways are higher than our ways! Lord, continue to challenge us with your generous grace! Transform our minds daily through your Word. Refashion and reshape our lives so that we may proclaim your goodness in all that we say and do, as we serve you until the day you give us our final gift of grace! God, we thank you! For all the blessings that you pour upon us, for the fruit of your creation, for the good of work and the blessing of family, and most of all we praise you that Love has found us! Thanks be to God, that he has found us and called us to himself that we may serve him now as we await the eternal reward promised to all those who believe in Jesus as Savior. Amen.