

GRACE FOR ALL

(Genesis 9.8-17 and Matthew 20.1-16)

Great to be here- series on grace -7th of 8 sermons- themes covered so far have included how grace changes everything and grace to start again.

Today our theme is “grace for all” and we will be particularly looking at the parable of the workers in the vineyard and how we can learn from that and apply it to our lives.

The hymn that we have just sung was written by Martin Luther and this year is one when Luther is particularly remembered.

It's the 500th anniversary of when Luther, then a professor of theology, published his theses and said to have also nailed them on the door of his church - cannot earn or pay for God's forgiveness.

These theses challenged false belief – particularly the selling of indulgences or certificates believed to set apart punishment for sins for the people who bought them or their dead relatives.

Even more importantly, Luther emphasized the truth of the grace of God - forgiveness of sins by the grace of God and new spiritual life for all who trust in our Lord Jesus as their personal saviour.

Luther is said to have “rediscovered” salvation by grace through faith. He made the Bible available for people by translating it into German so that people could hear the good news of God's love for them in their own language.

Our first reading

Noah and the rainbow was a sign of God's covenant or promise to his people. It's the first reference to God's covenant in the Bible- that was specifically God's promise not to bring a flood to destroy all life.

The idea of God's covenant or promises continued in the Old Testament. Abraham: "I will confirm my covenant between you and me."

Moses: received the Old Testament law from God – and the covenant in the Old Testament times meant that God's people had to strictly obey the law – Scribes and Pharisees observed the law very strictly and still so for Jews today.

However Jesus changed that.

During the last supper Jesus spoke of his blood of the new covenant. In the book of Hebrews Jesus is described as the mediator of the new covenant. In our communion services we remember that Jesus died for us on the cross and that his blood was shed for us.

Just as the rainbow reminds us of God's first covenant, the cross (and our communion services) remind us of the new covenant. New life of faith in Jesus Christ as saviour – by God's grace

I find the acrostic or memory aid helpful when we think about grace

Grace = God's
 riches
 at
 Christ's
 expense

Workers vineyard

Story of pub quiz- team member arriving late – last round only – but team members insisted prize shared.

- and football match – substitute 93rd minute – celebrated as a team member.

These stories illustrate the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

In the parable- same reward- generosity and grace of God

The parable illustrates how people are called to faith at different times of their lives- by God's grace.

Early in the morning= early in life

9am, 12md and 3pm = adult or middle life

And then 5pm or the 11th hour (according to an online encyclopaedia- the phrase the 11th hour in the English language originates from this parable in Matthew 20).

They too became workers in God's vineyard.

We are not told in the parable but the addition of fresh workers very late in the day would have been great not only for the workers themselves but for getting the work completed.

(Story of mechanics in a garage- blessing of extra workforce joining in and getting the job done).

So Jesus teaches that some people will come to faith very late in their lives.

We do have to be careful here- Jesus is not teaching that all people will become Christians. Just a few chapters later in Matthew 25 Jesus teaches about judgement; separating sheep from goats -.

Then we come to the time of giving the rewards.

In the parable by God's grace and sovereignty – all received the same reward.

Reaction- not same as the pub quiz team members.

"It's not fair" – verse 11 and 12.

Landowner's reply-

"It is fair" – verses 13-15a. It's God's business, not our business.

And a warning: "are you envious because I am generous?"

Cf parable of the prodigal son – the reaction of the elder brother when the prodigal son returned and there was a big celebration.

A question- who do we identify with in this parable?

Are we delighted that those who have come along at the 11th hour have the same reward? Or can we identify with those who have been toiling all day?

Do we ever have a tinge of jealousy for those who have been converted and God by his grace has given them gifts to serve him that surprise and amaze us?

It can be right to think this through. We may have done much work in a long life of service and perhaps some setbacks too.

However much we have done we can never earn God's forgiveness. We will also have received many blessings through God's grace that those who come late to trust in the Lord miss out on in their lives.

Jesus concluded the parable in verse 16- the last will be first and the first last. Who was that for?

The disciples – not to have wrong expectations for the future- not sitting at Jesus' right and left hand.

The Jewish leaders- Jews first but gospel not only for the Jews- gentiles too.

Our lives today – God's ways are different.

So what are the applications of this parable for us?

1. Thanks for God's grace- that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

2. Reminder that people come to faith at different stages of life and encourage us to pray for children that we know, teenagers, young, middle aged or older adults life.

Our next hymn- Lord of All Hopefulness- reminds us of God's blessings at all stages of our lives.

We may have been praying for friends or family members for decades but we can still trust in the lord and keep praying.

We can look forward to the last being saved and what God might do through them in 11th hour. Pray for a working of the Holy Spirit

3. Pray for our attitude to others- are we gracious- how would we feel if a well-known criminal were to be converted and join our church? How would we feel if God gave particular gifts to new believers?

4. Prayers for ourselves - remember grace we are saved through faith – opportunity to thank God afresh for his saving grace- and be open to God's working in our lives in a new way by the power of his spirit
Later in this service we will be singing the hymn amazing grace- written by john newton who had been the captain of a slave ship before his conversion to Christianity-

He wrote the familiar words:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;

We can sing those words as act of new commitment to God for ourselves and as a prayer for others too.

Prayer

Thanks for God's amazing grace.....

Gracious lord help us to be humble enough to take whatever place we are given and zealous enough to work wholeheartedly for your glory where and when you call us.