

## WELCOME

Grace and peace be with you my friends and familia on this lovely Sunday!

Thank you for coming!

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center is  
a church with full real life standing in the Eastern Association;  
Southern California Nevada Conference of the  
United Church of Christ (UCC).

And as a UCC church, we'd like you to know that:

"No matter who you are,  
or where you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here."

My name is Yadi Martínez-Reyna, I am one of the Pastors in this community.  
And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

It is such a blessing to be here with you today.

Our service today will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have voice and media turned on.

If you don't know how to do that, let someone know and we'll try to help.

There will be a link in Nearby so you can watch it in your browser if the viewer isn't working for you.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder in the back along with a donation bowl.

One of the blessings and responsibilities that come with our being a real church with real standing is that we, like all UCC churches, support the work of the national church not only with prayer but financially.

So we greatly appreciate any offering you can make to support this ministry.

If you prefer, donations can be made on our website, [firstuccsl.org](http://firstuccsl.org).

We are all here together seeking to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in life.

Oh how good it feels to be real in second life!

## GATHERING MUSIC

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

Opening Song -

Tracy Chapman - Talking about a revolution

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xv8FBjo1Y8I>

## SCRIPTURE

The book of Matthew 20:1-16 NRSV

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.

When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went.

When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.

And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?

Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?

So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God.

## SERMON

How is this Fair?

Will you pray with me?

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence.  
Touch my lips of clay and mold them to be for your honor and glory.  
Amen.

Today's scriptures paint a picture of something that at face value can seem unfair to some.

This parable talks about the Kingdom of heaven being like this man who hires people to work and then pays them what he promised.

As a Latine person, I know people who go and stand around a market place area and wait to be hired for a day's wages.

At least in Texas, I have seen this.

I'm not sure if you all have witnessed this.

Day laborers waiting around for someone to go and pick them up.

People standing around is what comes to mind as this scene opens.

At dawn as it was customary there are those workers ready to get hired.

I'm not a morning person, friends.

So it takes a lot of effort, planning, praying, and a lot of alarms to get me up in the mornings when I have an early appointment.

Some are morning people and no matter what time they went to sleep they are up with coffee at hand and smile in their face by 5 a.m.

Either way, to be up by dawn to go work in my opinion takes commitment.

The parable tells us that the owner of the vineyard hired those who were ready to go to work early in the morning.

Now, the scriptures do not tell us if those who had been hired were overwhelmed by work that he had to go and hire more people.

It simply says that he kept going back to hire more at nine, at noon and at five.

The scriptures do make the distinction to say that those hired at five only worked at hour.

Either way we learn at the end that everyone got paid the same, one denarius.

I ask you, how is this fair?

Jesus in the book of Mark and Luke uses the pattern and phrase of "the first should be last and the last should be first."

A phrase that does not make much sense in today's world, probably in their world too since it kept coming up so much.

My siblings, we are called to live our life and live it in abundance.

It often have heard many in the church say, God helps those who help themselves!

Is this Biblical?

I have not found it but if you do please share with me on private chat.

From a very young age I was told if you do good then you will be rewarded.

If you do bad, then bad things happen.

This is such a flawed concept.

But even my dad who was not religious but he loved Greek mythology subscribe to this thinking.

He would say, "don't tempt the Gods!"

My siblings, as children of God and heirs, we partake of a table of a meal where we welcome all to come and sit by us.

I believe everyone could read the scriptures, even this story and understand that God is showing us love, mercy, grace and forgiveness.

And for the most part we are okay with it.

For the most part, until something happens that tests our limits, our commitment to the one who invited us to follow.

Salie McFague in her book "Life abundantly" talks about an ecosystem that is interconnected with each other in the world.

In the greater scheme of things everything around is connected like the plants, the insects, the animal kingdom, and even us as stewards of this earth.

This all makes sense.

We all need community.

We all follow the one who calls us and gives us love, forgiveness, and grace.

This all makes sense to a point.

If you have been an employee of any kind I want you to enter this story with those sets of eyes.

You wake up early and come to work on time expecting to be paid.

You know there is that worker who comes in late and does half the job.

But, you will be rewarded more than he will get.

We live in a world where the system of rewards and punishment make sense.

We live in a world where those who do more get more.

When I was a child I had to help my grandmother who owned a little candy store right in front of my elementary school.

She once said to me once, "In life you work hard for what you want, you earn it."

She was always encouraging me to think of ways to earn a living and not wait to be given anything.

So one day, I realized she was throwing away the pickle juice from a large five gallon bucket.

So instead of throwing it away I stashed it in my little art studio she had given me.

This was but a closet friend about four feet wide and six feet long.

Soon I had a side hustle going on.

I have been an entrepreneur since I was young.

So I started to sell the pickle juice in a zip lock bag for 25.cents.  
Other times, kids would go around the little store to my door and I would pour  
pickle juice in their popcorn, chips,or whatever for a quarter.  
Then I got caught.

My grandmother was proud.  
But then she made me return the proceeds to the store, it was her pickle juice after  
all.  
How is this fair?

As a day laborer working all day and being paid the same as the one who woke up late  
and worked only an hour does not sound fair to me.

Does it seem fair to you?

Unlike the parable of the prodigal son this parable bugs me.  
Yeah the prodigal son wasted his money, came back home and was forgiven.  
Yeah the oldest was mad but he still had his money and the other one did not.  
Yeah that makes sense but it's not a bad parable after all.

When I was older I asked my grandmother why she punished me and took my money from  
the side hustle?  
She said because you did not ask, you just took.

It still made no sense to me.  
Just like this parable at first glance I'm okay with it but then, it bugged me.

Are you serious?  
How is this fair?

When I was thinking about titles for this sermon I came up with another alternative,  
like "This is why worker unions got started."

But I settled in, how is this fair?

If you have worked in the sun, toiled all day, woke up early dragging yourself out  
of bed and then you get paid the same as the 'I just work an hour dude', it is so  
not fair.

I kept coming with all kinds of grumblings to the Holy-One.

I was right along with these guys and the vineyard owner, going what the heck man?

I was like what about women's pay being less than men but the work is more for less?

What about American wall-street people?  
What about Enron, or Madoff or all those who did not mind taking everything from the  
people?  
What about women sports, athletes, Olympians, disabled people..and on and on the  
grumblings of Pastor Yadi went.

What about...(the list went on and on)

At one point I was thinking this is a bad sermon, it is really making me uncomfortable.

How is this fair?

Now that is the point, said the Holy-one, it is not by any standards of earth, society, and men fair at all.

That regardless if you could wake up early or not, you will have a day's pay and food on the table.

That is the point!

The Kingdom of God is not governed by those who were able to run faster, work faster, and have the means to get to the front of the line, because they will be asked to step back and those who barely made it to the line move forward.

That is the point - That everyone regardless of (fill in the blank) are worthy, deserving, loved, invited and given blessings.

How is this fair?

By human standards it is not.

By human standards the system of rewards and punishment works because we want to see the punishment.

It makes sense that if you do not work, you do not eat.

It makes sense that if you did not get a good job with insurance, tough luck.

It makes sense that if you do not go hustle, you get no pay.

Why food stamps?

Why government handouts?

Why give you money for nothing you did?

But then why bank bailouts?

Why extra bonuses to big pharma or buses while the rest are laid off?

The system is flawed.

The system seems like it rewards those who earn it and not those who do not.

But the reality is that the system becomes who you know, how much favor you can buy, and who do you step on to get ahead?

This is what Jesus was rejecting with this parable.

This is what he was saying with the pattern of all get what is rightfully theirs to get.

Pastor Jamie in their sermon Friday invited us to think about how fairness was a human construct one that was attempting to show an illusion of all being treated

equal.

While Grace invited us into a new live of forgives, freedom and completeness.

The man in the story says, did I not give you what was fair?  
Did I not tell you that you would be paid one denarius?  
Is this not my money to do as I want?

It is not fair by human standards.  
That was what was bothering me with this parable.

How is it fair God that we work, toil, get bullied, get pushed around, ridiculed, etc.etc. etc.and then you still invite them to sit with us and eat this meal?

When we hold on to our human standards, our rewards and punishment ideas we will always feel cheated.

It is only when I came to the cross, got on my knees and said,okay God help me lay all of this down.  
Help me lay down my jealousy, my need to see punishment,my need to be vindicated.  
Help me because I am holding on tightly to this bag no matter how heavy it is.  
It is when I said help my unbelief.  
Help my human flawed self, let go that I found rest.

Now I understand what Jesus was trying to show me with this parable.  
Siblings, this parable is the rejection of domination and the smugness of those in power.

The Jesus way makes no sense.  
It makes no sense that one will love when we don't deserve it.

It makes no sense to be forgiven, and love unconditionally regardless of what you have done, will do or can do.

But it makes sense that we can not buy, earn or work our entire lifetime to buy that love, grace and forgiveness.

Because if it was this way we would never find joy, blessings, favor, and abundant life.  
We would always be out maneuvered,out run, and pushed to the back.

But Jesus said, no, regardless of what our bank account looks like, this is all yours!

Like anyone at the back of the line sitting back there because we were not physically able, wealthy or well connected,we are thankful when the doors open and the Holy-One says, you at the back, come on in, my grace is yours.

Now that is what the enemy of our lives says is not fair.

But the Holy-one- of those in the margins says, it is my grace, my joy, my love, my blessings, my wholeness, am I not able to do with it as I want?

Yes, please!

Beyond fairness, it is the need to hold on to the trust that God is just and justice prevails.

So siblings, joy, blessings, wholeness, forgiveness, and life abundantly is yours, no questions asked.

Amen.

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We have come to this time of prayers.  
Together we will lift our prayers of joy and concerns.  
We are a community that holds each other in prayer.

Today, I invite you while this song  
plays to type in your prayer request in the chat box.

You Never Let Go - Matt Redman (Lyrics)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkUEyGZ4lfU>,

Holy-One hear our prayers.  
Those voiced here today  
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts  
those for which we have no words  
We lift them all to you

May we remember your blessings and your love in our lives and may we share with all  
those around us.

Amen

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Let us go forth from this place into the world to find yourself; a cause you can  
live for; and a love you can live into.

Blessings in this upcoming week

#### MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

The Times They Are a-Changin' (Live at Madison Square Garden, New York, NY - October  
1992) - Tracy Chapman  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0w6ReLIPUc>,