
“That’s Not Fair”

“The first will be last” children’s sermon
from Matthew 20:1-16



Main Objective: Children will often lament the gross “injustice” they might see in their world. Kids want to be first, want to be winners, want to get the best of things. They tend to feel and act upset if they sense that things are not fair. The parable of the workers in the field reminds us that people have always

expressed anger for what seems unfair. It also reminds us that God’s view of “fair” is not the same as our human understanding, and that’s actually quite a positive thing for us. As forgiven people, we don’t get what we deserve—and that saves our souls!

Law/Gospel Theme: The parable found in this passage is a beautiful assurance of what grace is. God promises to give us life. It doesn’t matter what age our stage we accept the gift of Christ’s salvation. We can be promised full free forgiveness, because God has granted it. This story expresses the truth that life is often not fair. However, if we got everything we deserved, we would receive punishment and death for our sins! Instead, we get mercy and life in Jesus. We should give thanks to God that life’s not fair!

Optional Materials: Small items to pass around (stickers, coins, candies), or bags with various small items inside; small crosses.

Bible Passage: Matthew 20:1-16

Message Note: As with most messages, the details of how you choose to communicate this are adaptable and should cater to timing as well as to your audience and student needs. Use your judgment and ideas to best serve students.

Don’t miss the [video demonstration of this children’s sermon](#) on our [YouTube channel](#). We also have a full [Sunday School lesson on Matthew 20:1-16](#) and other resources related to the [Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard](#).



Children's Sermon (Matthew 20:1-16)

The First Will Be Last

Greet children, with stickers, bags of items, or small treats in hand:

Hello, children of God! Do you like getting treats and treasures? It just so happens that I have some items here that I'd like to give you. Are you ready? *(Choose how and what you would like to distribute. You might give out a small sticker or candy, but give everyone a different number. Or you could pass out several bags with different items inside, some small and others more exciting. For the sake of this script, we will say the latter has taken place.)*

Okay, let's see what you have there in your bags. Let's open them up. Hmm...what kinds of things do you see? *(Allow children time to look inside and discover what is in their bags. Some may complain over their items.)*

Wow...it seems like some of you have much bigger items than others. Does that seem fair? I mean, Judy's really seems a lot different than Susan's. Do you think it's odd that you have such various things (or numbers of things)??

Well, there are a lot of times in our lives when things might not seem fair...and believe it or not, that's actually a great thing for us! Sometimes we might feel like we don't deserve things that happen to us. Well, in the Gospel lesson today, there were some people who felt upset over something that happened. Jesus told a parable (a special story) about a farmer who hired workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the first person he hired a certain amount, we'll say it was fifty dollars, for the day of work.

A little while later, he found another person who wanted a job, and hired him on for the same amount of money. Then he found another and another worker, and let them start laboring as well. He even found someone who jumped into the job in the last hour of the day. Well, the owner gathered everyone around at the end of the day, and each worker received the fifty bucks. The first workers were upset, because they didn't get any extra pay for working longer. But the owner said that he could do what he wanted with his money, and everyone was going to get the same pay check.

See, in today's world, we sometimes worry a lot about things being fair. We think we earn and deserve things that we get, and we get upset if we think we've been cheated or mistreated. In



this parable, Jesus reminds us that we don't always need to be the first, or the hardest working, or the best in society's eyes. Maybe we go to church our whole lives, and maybe we learn about Jesus in a nursing home. Maybe we make mistakes, or maybe we aim to do a lot of things right. God offers forgiveness to all of us. Remember how I mentioned that it's a good thing life isn't always fair? If we wanted life to be "fair" so that we would always get exactly what we deserved, we would actually get what we deserved for sin.

The Bible promises that we all sin, and for that we deserve death and punishment. But we don't get it! Instead, by God's mercy and grace, we receive eternal life in Heaven. We don't "deserve" or earn that. It doesn't even seem "fair." But what a blessing for us that God has given us Jesus. He died, even though He didn't deserve it at all. And because of that death, we can LIVE!

Take another peek in your bag (*or have small crosses to pass out*). It's a cross! We ALL receive the forgiveness that comes through Jesus. Good thing life's not always fair... Let's thank God for His grace.

Children's Prayer Moment

(Have kids repeat each line)

Dear God,

Thank you for granting us mercy and forgiveness

Thank you that life isn't fair

And that means life for us!

Remind us to be faithful and patient

Thank you for your love

We love you, God!

In Jesus name, Amen!



Matthew 20:1-16 ESV

Bible Verses/story to Reference:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ “About nine in the morning 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 noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon 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 five in the afternoon 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 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, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one 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.”

-Matthew 20:1-16





This lesson was prepared by [Kristin Schmidt](#), who serves at the Epiphany Lutheran Church in Castle Rock, CO.

She has shared her teaching gifts through *Ministry-To-Children* since 2014 and now serves as our lead curriculum writer.

Kristin has a professional background in elementary and pre-school education. A graduate of Biola University, she holds a Master of Education and will receive the Master of Theology degree from Concordia University, Irvine, California, in May

2020. Kristin grew up in southern California and lived the past 10 years in Georgia. She is a long-distance runner and voracious reader.

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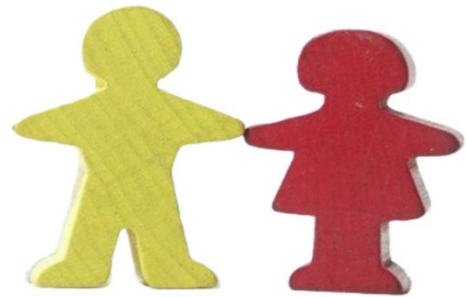
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