

## Matthew 20: 1-16 Trust Me

After the Baptism of Greyson and welcoming the new members of this congregation, we will say together the Apostles' Creed. It is the most commonly shared creed in the Western churches. Although the creed as we read it today first appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, we can trace its roots back to the baptismal liturgy of the mid-second century, which was based on various expressions of faith in Jesus Christ found in the New Testament.

Because the church is the body of the risen Christ in this world, our faith in Jesus Christ and our desire to live this faith, wherever God has placed us, is what unites us as a church. Baptism in the second century was almost entirely limited to adults and a profession of faith was part of the ritual. So, the Creed developed over time, and for early Christians, exact wording wasn't so important as the content of what new members affirmed as they became part of the Christian church. So today, every time we celebrate the sacrament of Baptism and whenever we welcome new members to a congregation, we say the Apostles' Creed together.

Later in the service, when we say the Creed together, you'll notice that each paragraph about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit begins with the phrase "I believe." As you read on, paying attention to the words, you might wonder if you actually "believe" all the things you're saying aloud; you might wonder "do I even understand what this means?" Some of you might even feel guilty because you actually have trouble "believing" some things in there... But...

Christian faith is not so much about believing certain statements about God as it is about trusting this God who is the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of our lives. As I've said before, the Greek word translated into the English word "believe" is the same as the words "trust" and "faith" that we read in the New Testament. A Christian writer Kathleen Norris says, "at its Greek root, to believe simply means to give one's heart to."

What God cares is not what we believe about Jesus, but that we believe IN, have faith IN, and trust IN Jesus. When Jesus says in John's Gospel, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." He's basically saying to us, "Trust Me."

Scripture readings today, both the Hebrew Scripture and the Gospel reading, are stories about some hearts very much troubled and about God who says "Trust Me." When we later proclaim the Apostles Creed together, saying "I believe," what kind of God are we putting our trust in and giving our hearts to?

Let us listen to the first story, Yvonne reads to us from the Hebrew Scripture, the Book of Jonah, 3:11-4:10.

“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.’ And the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’ Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so, Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’

But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?’ And he said, ‘Yes, angry enough to die.’ Then the Lord said, ‘You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?’

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

At the beginning of the story, Jonah is unhappy that God would save the wicked people of Ninevah; they don’t deserve God’s mercy, according to Jonah. Jonah doesn’t like that everyone gets grace. He’s not happy for other’s good fortune. He doesn’t like it when people don’t get what they deserve, even though he gets grace; he benefits from the tree that came out of nowhere and gets furious when it wither.

Listening to this story, how did Jonah’s behavior make you feel? He is like a little kid throwing tantrum, isn’t he? Did you roll your eyes? Did you feel embarrassed for him, by him? I’ve felt all of these feelings, but there is something about Jonah that I cannot completely hold in contempt; there’s something about him that’s strangely familiar to me.

And how did God’s behavior make you feel? Did you empathize with Jonah, “yeah, Jonah, I get it; I feel for you.” His indignation at God being a “gracious God and merciful, slow

to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.” The emotional roller coaster he went through, when he was given grace and the grace was taken away... It feels familiar; it troubles my heart.

In the field of depth psychology of the Christian psychologist Carl Jung, “Shadow” is the unconscious part of ourselves where we have shoved everything in us that we feel are unacceptable in the society; anything that we don’t approve in and about ourselves get shoved into our Shadow, creating and nurturing our Shadow Self that would act out, from time to time, much in the way Jonah did. We are not aware of our Shadow, and we don’t like it. We can smell it when we see it in someone else, like Jonah.

Jonah is my and our Shadow side. It’s the selfish and ungrateful part of us that we don’t dare admit it’s there and unconsciously cover up, so it doesn’t show up in our conscious sense of who we are. It’s the part of us that we don’t even acknowledge, but God talks to that part of us, the spiritually poor self within us, that we can’t even face ourselves, cooing us to show how silly we are to begrudge God’s graciousness to all God’s creation. God works on the part of us that we have dismissed, bringing healing and renewal. That’s the kind of God we are called to trust.

Hear now the Gospel according to Matthew, 20: 1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; 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 the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 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 the usual daily wage? 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.’

In this parable of Jesus, those who received the amount they agreed on are upset because they worked more and got paid the same as other who did not put in the same amount of work. But the landowner kept his word; he honored the agreement with those hired first and paid them what they had agreed and accepted. They are upset not because they were treated unfairly or unjustly, but because others received grace.

The God, whom we are called to trust, honors fairness and upholds justice, AND on top of that, chooses to be generous. I hear that the Hollywood studios and workers on strike are close to coming to an agreement. I hope the autoworkers, too, get a “fair deal,” and that no one is exploited, cheated, abused.... AND I hope everybody holds on to their right to be generous, as this landowner did.

Those hired first had their trust in the contract they reached with the landowner. Those who were hired later throughout the day had their trust in the words of the Landowner “I’ll pay you whatever is right.” And the last group didn’t even discuss the wage, they trusted, that is, they “gave their heart to the One” who gave them work when nobody else would take them. To those whom the society neglects and rejects, God says “I have need of you.”

God’s righteousness is more than fairness and justice, as precious as they are. God’s righteousness is abundant goodness, abounding in steadfast love. It is such God in whom we put our trust, to whom we give our hearts, when we say “I believe” in God almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

On Greyson whose life has just begun, on Amie, who has been part of this church community her entire life, and John and Margaia who desire to join this particular church at this juncture in their lives, on each of them, God’s grace flows abundantly, in equal measure, which is beyond measure.

May Greyson grow into experience such abundant grace and generosity of God in his life; may he always feel so blessed. May all of us who have been baptized, remember it is in the hand of such God our lives are tenderly held. And, if you have never been baptized and never thought much about it, may you know the invitation to live a life that is fair, just, and overflowing in grace. May it be so.