

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20 2026

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Mind Your Own Business"

Based on Matthew 20:1-16

It's not fair, is it? The guy that worked the longest should have received more money than the others at the end of the day, or at least, the others should have received less than the first guy, based on the time they had spent in the field. That's how it works, right: fair work for fair wage.

Until we have to define what God sees as 'fair.' Because working for God is not about mathematical calculations, check lists, or a measuring stick. Although some of our great theologians of the Reformation seemed to have the idea that there might be some sort of check list on St. Peter's clipboard when one arrived at heaven's pearly gates, the scriptures clearly tell us time and time again: our salvation has never been based on our 'good works for the Lord,' but on 'our deep our faith in the Lord.'

Which is a difficult idea to grasp, and an even more difficult idea to believe, because we live in a world that is highly polarized in the idea that effort equals compensation.

- The more I work, the more successful I should be.
- The more outgoing I am, the more popular I should be.

- The more I watch my pennies, the richer I should be.
- The more I do at the church, the more guaranteed I will be, to have a place in that holy eternity beyond the golden gates (or at least get honourable mention at the next Annual Meeting!)

Many years ago in my first church, there was a man who was very proud of the fact that his family, and the generations who had come before him, had attended that church since the first day the doors were opened.

- He had been baptized in that church,
- He had grown up in the Sunday School at that church,
- He had been confirmed and took his first communion at that church.
- He had served on various committees and boards at that church.

And, with great conviction, he would proclaim,

- He would be buried from this church. (Which he was, with the full funeral already written by him ahead of time.)

He came across as a most humble man, head always bowed in great reverence during prayer. He would refuse communion if ever there was something in his heart he felt was wicked or ill

thinking. His family's story, it would seem, was his enduring gift to the community.

And yet, somewhere along the way, his faith had become pious, and his great piety had become pride. He dragged his feet, spiritually speaking, to anything that might change the church from the way it had been when he was growing up. He read The Book of Forms at bedtime, so each Session Meeting was followed precisely to the letter of the laws of the church. When something happened that displeased him, he would bow his head in submission, making it clear to everyone how unhappy he was, without ever saying a word.

Now I'm pretty sure that this man believed he was being the most diligent servant of Christ that that community had ever offered for heavenly admission. But I often wondered what the conversation between he and St. Peter might have been when that moment arrived.

- I followed all the instructions properly, Lord.
- I held my family's name high, Lord.
- I prayed earnestly, lived very modestly, was contrite, and turned the other cheek.

"But did you build my kingdom," I wonder if the Lord asked. "What did you do to spread the Good News to new ears?"

God's measuring stick is not ours. And God says, "Mind your own business."

- I will be one One who judges who is worthy and who is not.
- I will be the One who decides whose worth and work is of My vision.
- I will decide "Who to free and who to blame," as Jonney Cash crooned in "When the Man Comes Around."

"Don't I have the right to do what I want...or are you envious because I am generous?"
~Matthew 20:15

- We assume that the workers who arrived early worked hard and diligently for the entire day in the hot sun. But did they?
 - There's always one in the office who looks busy but accomplishes little.
- We assume that the workers who came later were lazy, couldn't be bothered to get up early enough, or looking for an easy buck with little effort. But were they?
 - What if the ones who came later in the day had just finished their first job of the day, catching some extra hours to help pay the bills.
 - What if some of the men had been caught in an emergency, or caring for an aging parent or ill child, and couldn't get away until later in the day?

- What if the last servant who arrived very late, worked harder in one hour, than the rest who had been there the entire day?

Of course, we don't have answers to any of these questions. The scripture does not tell us anything about the circumstances around the story. And perhaps that is the point.

- How quick we are to judge what we see, not what we know for sure.
- How quick we are to make assumptions, based not on facts, but what we would do in that situation.
- How quick we are to decide who is in the right and who is in the wrong; who is good and who is bad in the story.
- How quick we are to look only at the surface of people's actions, rather than consider the true motivations and intentions; the story behind the story, which has led to this moment.

We fool ourselves all the time on this slippery slope of judgement. And of particular note, is when it happens in the church, when it invades our faith journey, when we start to 'measure up' our denomination against another, or our service to the church with another, or the measure of our love for God, compared to another.

Here are the facts:

- There are those who come early to the faith, and those who come late.
- There will be those here to put on a good show, and

those who actually show up to learn about God, deepen their relationship with God, or revive their souls for the work of God in the coming week

- There will be those you consider worthy of a place in the heavenly mansion, and those you think should be sent away.
- There will be those who appear to work hard for the Lord, and those you consider lazy.

But when it is all said and done, you do not get to decide who is in and who is out, who is worthy, and who is not. And thank God it's not a task left up to you or I, with our limited vision and even less understanding of one's full story and purpose.

Thank God, we have God, who sees all, knows all, understands all, and judges us, based not on what the world sees and believes to be true, but what He has seen in our entirety. Thank God we have a God who is generous with His love, compassionate in His care, and deeply invested in understanding us.

So don't worry about what your neighbour is up to: about his faith, about his vegetable garden or if he's decided to wash the car. Mind your own business, and make sure your business is worthy and to God's liking. Because sometimes, "...the last will be first, and the first will be last." (Matthew 20:16)

And it will be God who decides. Amen.