

## **Please and Thank You? *Matthew 20:1-16***

Norwalk Christian Church, September 16, 2018, Proper 19, Year B (Diverted from Lectionary), R U Kidding Series

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What are the magic words? Please and Thank you. All week, I've had that old Barney song stuck in my head, "Please and thank you are the magic words." Kids raise your hands if an adult has ever asked you to say, "Please and Thank you." ....

Adults, raise your hands if you've asked a kid to say, "Please and thank you."

We teach our kids these magic words--but what makes them magic?

Just last week, Oliver came to me wanting something. I don't remember what it was, but knowing him it was something sweet. And I was about to give it to him, when I stopped. I wasn't even thinking about this sermon yet, but I said to him, "Say please and thank you."

And you know what--that boy is smart. He said Please and I gave it to him, holding onto it until he said thank you. *Isn't he a sweet boy.* Saying "please and thank you" after I extorted him.

Why do we force gratitude upon our children? Our hopes are, after a few times, we won't have to force it. They will do it naturally, and grow up into polite, and grateful adults.

So tell me, did it work for you? Are you polite, grateful adults?

I don't know about you, but I will say thank you if someone let's me go in front of them in line at the grocery store. I am thankful for things I believe I don't deserve.

But what about the things I think I do deserve. Don't I deserve to wake up in the morning, to breath in clean air, to have a job, to get a paycheck from that job--I don't say thank you for these things.

Who writes a thank you note to their employer for their paycheck? But if you get a bonus--then you say thank you. It's something you didn't deserve.

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This morning, we read another parable from the Gospel of Matthew. We are in week four of our worship series, "R U Kidding?" And each week we've paired one of these parables with a lesson we adults like to teach children, but sometimes forget as adults.

But I don't know about you, but I am finding these parables AND these lessons to be a little harder than I thought they would be.

Our theme two weeks ago was “Be Fair”, but maybe that would’ve been a better theme for this week’s parable. It seems more about fairness than gratitude. This landowner, hires people at different times of the day--yet gives them all the same wage. Is this fair?

Maybe the ones hired later should say, “Thank you,” but what about those hired first? Sure, they got a job, but they had to work for it, and those free loaders hired at the end of the day got a paycheck they didn’t *fully* earn.

If gratitude is the lens through which we are viewing this parable, then what’s the lesson for us today?

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I worked all week on that question, and the best I could come up with is this: We should be extremely thankful because we have received so much more than we deserve, like those workers who got paid for a day and only worked 3 hours. We have more than we deserve, so we should say thank you.

I was about to preach that...and then I remembered Olympia. I will never forget Olympia. I met her when I was 14--21 years ago--when my Church youth group took a trip to Honduras.

We were helping her build a house, a house made of sticks and mud on the tiny piece of property that was hers, that just so happened to be on the side of a hill. Every rainy season, her house would wash away, and another church group would show up and build her house again.

That summer, it was our turn to build the house again. And when we finished, her face glowed. She had the biggest smile I’d ever seen, and she said, Gracias, gracias, gracias--over and over and over again. You would’ve thought we built her a mansion.

I have never seen someone more thankful--and more happy--than Olympia. And yet she had so very little. She worked harder than all of us, yet received so much less. I remember thinking: I have so much more than she does, but I’m not nearly as grateful as she is. Isn’t the one with the most supposed to be the most grateful?

Maybe something is wrong with the way we think about gratitude. Because Olympia, who had the least, had become the greatest.

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I have a book in my office called *Read My Lips*. It’s a study about American attitudes towards paying taxes. The story we hear is that everyone hates taxes--but the author’s research shows that most Americans are actually content with paying taxes, until they perceive someone else as not paying their fair share. Maybe it’s a wealthy person with tax shelters or a poor person with handouts. My tax rate may stay the same, but now it doesn’t quite seem fair.

Do you remember that question the landowner asks the first-hired-workers at the end of the parable: “Are you envious because I am generous?” Are you envious because I am generous?

Envy has a way of killing gratitude every time. Had everyone been hired at the same time and paid the same, then everyone would be grateful. But envy creeps in because the first-hired-workers feel like the other “johnny come lately” got more than they worked for.

It’s hard to be grateful for what we have, when we think others are getting it without working as hard as we did.

The refugee, the immigrant, the day laborer--I worked hard for my job, I did it the right way, and they’re just getting handouts? The welfare queen. Kids these days, getting everything so easy. As our health fades, we envy those who have better health. When we struggle financially, we envy those who have it easy. When we struggle with our faith, we envy those for whom it comes so easy.

Envy creeps in and takes over gratitude.

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Olympia--she had every reason to be envious. Those rich, white kids, going home to their fancy homes, building a mud hut for her. And yet, she was so thankful. Maybe that’s the secret. Don’t envy what others have, just be grateful for what you have.

In our parable, no one deserves anything. They are day laborers. The landowner surprised them with a chance for work when they wouldn’t have had any. And the landowner gives everyone the same grace that every person deserves—their daily wage.

We prayed a moment ago, “give us this day our daily bread.” But what if God actually gave us what we asked for--just enough for today? How grateful would we be? Should we be even more grateful if we get more bread than we need for today? Or what if someone didn’t even go to church and pray the Lord’s Prayer, and God gives still gives them their daily bread--and then some?

Am I envious because God is so gracious?

This parable about gratitude turned into a parable about God’s grace. For we serve a God who gives us all our daily bread, and sometimes more so. A God who provides, not because we’ve earned it, but because God is gracious.

All of life is grace--a grace none of us, no matter how long we worked, could ever earn.

So maybe we should turn away from the envy, and breath in the magic of gratitude, and say to God, “Thank you.” Amen.