

Sunday 03/30/25 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: *“The Road to Redemption” Sermon Series: Part 4 of 7 – “Embrace God’s Grace and Love” Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:8-9, Matthew 20:1-16*

(Slides 1-14 will be listed in order throughout this sermon 😊!)

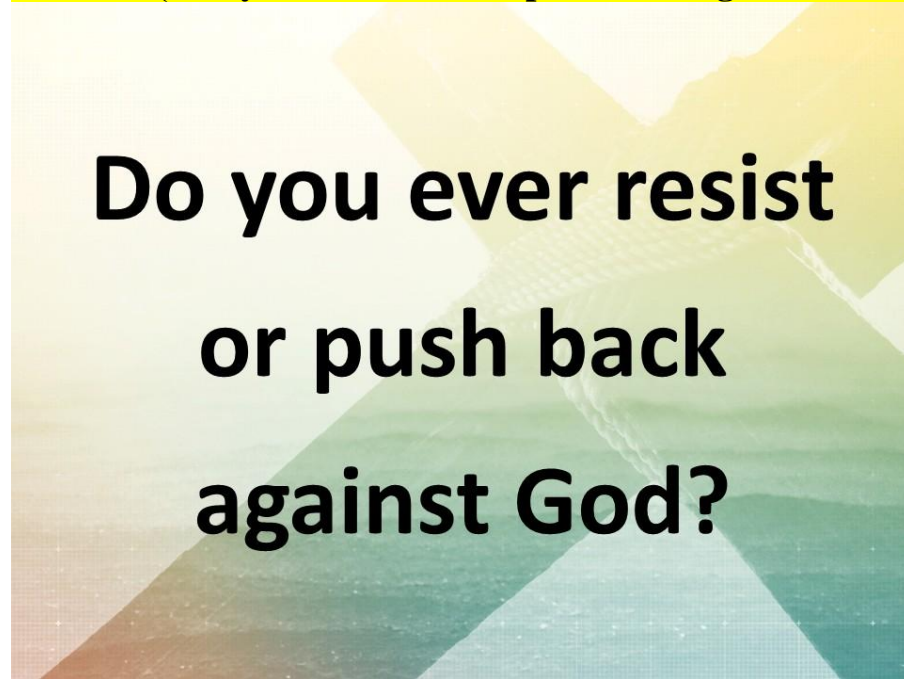
This morning, we are now two Sundays away from Holy Week. Two Sundays from today will celebrate Palm Sunday, leading to Good Friday, and then Easter morning. We have been symbolically walking together through this forty-day journey on “The Road to Redemption.” Forty-days, minus Sunday, leading to the cross of Christ, where Jesus Christ will lay down his life for us all. This morning, I want to talk about how Jesus teaches us to “Embrace God’s Grace and Love.” What did Jesus teach us about faith in Him, and how we can live that out in the world every day?

Slide 1 – (“The Road to Redemption – Part 4” – Opening Slide”)



Here is a question for us all to think about this morning:

Slide 2 – (“Do you ever resist or push back against God? - Question”)



Jesus calls us to turn to Him and live, but have we ever resisted or pushed back against God? Have we known or not known that we needed to turn to Jesus, and we just did not? Have we ever been angry or wrestled with God? Sometime people go on for years upset and angry, and maybe this puts a strain between them and God. In the Book of Genesis, Jacob wrestled with God all night, until God blessed him. Jacob then became known as “Israel,” which means “he struggles with God.” Are you struggling with God this morning?

This season that we find ourselves in is an opportunity to draw closer to Christ and to each other. This is why we are symbolically walking “The Road to Redemption” to Christ’s cross together. In order to better do this and to better

embrace all that God has for us, we are called to “Embrace God’s Grace and Love.” As I have often done in recent weeks, I have a couple of scriptures that I want to look at before my preaching scripture for today from Matthew 20:1-16. If you will open your bibles or bible apps the Book of Romans, I want to look first at Romans 5:8. This is what Romans 5:8 says:

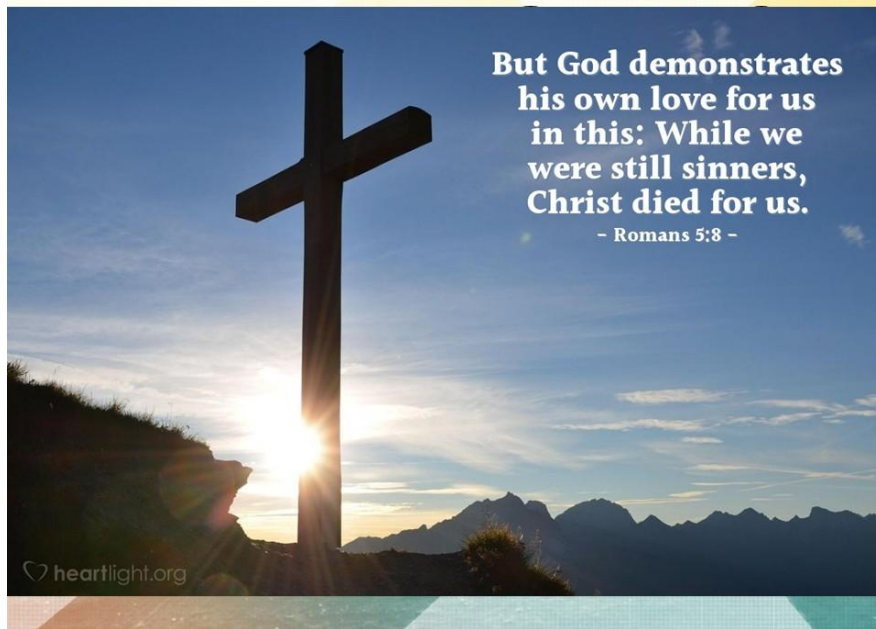
Slide 3 – (“Romans 5:8, NRSV”)

Romans 5:8, NRSV

⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Even though we all stumble, even though we all make mistakes, even though we sometimes sin, Jesus still died for us all. If Jesus did this for us while we were still sinners, then what, if anything is keeping us from “Embrace God’s Grace and Love” through Jesus Christ? We can see Romans 5:8 in a picture form, as well:

Slide 4 – (“Romans 5:8 - Picture”)



Are we are wrestling with God, are we distant from Him. Are our lives so busy right now that we have no time for prayer, no time for reading the Bible, and no time for God in general? Some people that I know like the time really early in the morning or really late at night when everything is quiet and still. Do we have times like this in our busy lives, or is our faith flickering but not burning bright? Are willing to try to take some time today, this week, and in general to be with God. To just breath in slowly, and breath out God’s grace. To hear the birds of spring chirp and know that God is renewing the earth around us. Despite what this world throws at us, God is real, and Jesus is risen.!

One other scripture about “God’s Grace and Love” for this morning is from Ephesians 2:8-9. If you will turn in your bibles or bible apps to Ephesians 2:8-9,

we hear once again about “God’s Grace and Love.” This is what Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

Slide 5 – (“Ephesians 2:8-9, NRSV”)

Ephesians 2:8-9, NRSV

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Grace from God through Jesus Christ, offered to us every minute of every day. It can be hard for us to embrace this though, when we feel like we are so busy that we are on roller skates. What is keeping from being closer to Christ? Are we resisting or pushing back against God?

I was very blessed this past Sunday to be invited to final Mass or worship service at our Lady of the Snows Roman Catholic Church here in Panama. I forgot that no one tells you when to stand or sit, or anything else in Roman Catholic Masses. You can spot an evangelical Christian from a mile away in a Roman Catholic Mass! Other than that, though, the people that were there greeted me with

so much kindness. One couple even wanted me to have lunch with them after the final Mass or service. While there are some theological and other differences that many of us have with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters, we heard that we are to put our trust in Jesus. It was inspiring for me to see people that have been part of a church that has been opened since 1956, to have so much hope for the future. It was a little strange that a few people called me “Father Paul” though, but to have faith and hope when your church of almost 70-years is closing their doors for good. Well, if that is not embracing “God’s Grace and Love,” then I do not know what it is. Wherever we are at in our lives this morning, on this “Road to Redemption,” heading to the cross of Christ, are we resisting God, or are we pushing God away. I saw this cute little video recently. It showed small child running up a staircase towards heaven, and Jesus came down to greet her, and they just hugged each other. Embracing “God’s Grace and Love,” are we struggling to do that today, or in general? Imagine that little child running up the stairs to hug Jesus? Maybe this morning some of are like that little child, and maybe just maybe we desperately in need of a hug from Jesus.

Our main preaching scripture for this morning, once again, is from the gospel of Matthew 20:1-16. This story or “parable” that Jesus gives us this morning is often called “The Laborers in the Vineyard.” I would invite you one last time to turn in your bibles or your bible apps to the gospel of Matthew, 20:1-16.

Let us read through the story or the “parable” of “The Laborers in the Vineyard” together:

Slide 6 – (“Mathew 20:1-3, NRSV”)

Matthew 20:1-3, NRSV

The Laborers in the Vineyard

20 ‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place;

Slide 7 – (“Mathew 20:4-6, NRSV”)

Matthew 20:4-6, NRSV

⁴ and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶ 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?”

Slide 8 – (“Mathew 20:7-9, NRSV”)

Matthew 20:7-9, NRSV

⁷ They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” ⁸ 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.” ⁹ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage

Slide 9 – (“Mathew 20:10-12, NRSV”)

Matthew 20:10-12, NRSV

¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.

¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² 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.”

Slide 10 – (“Mathew 20:13-16, NRSV”)

Matthew 20:13-16, NRSV

¹³ 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? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

This story or “parable” of “The Laborers in the Vineyard” can often be a controversial one for some. Once again, we have money and faith discussed. We have money and God. There is debate or payments, but what is bigger than the money is the reward of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus always puts faith in Him above all else.

In breaking down this scripture, let us go through this story or “parable” of “The Laborers in the Vineyard.” Jesus, once again, as he often did, would say, “For the kingdom of heaven is like.” Jesus is telling us that when his kingdom is ushered in here on earth, and then eternally in heaven, that what he is saying in this and other stories and parables, will be like the kingdom of heaven. This story or “parable” then, gives us a glimpse of the fullness of the kingdom of heaven. After

explaining that this and other stories or “parables” are like the kingdom of heaven, Jesus then gives us, once again, this story or “parable.” Since this is a story or “parable,” about a vineyard, many in this area with all the vineyards we have might be able to relate a little bit more this morning! In this story or “parable” the landowner, who is God, upon which the vineyard sits hired day laborers. Day laborers often do not often have a regular full-time job and often hope to get hired every day to make some money. This landowner, upon which his vineyard sat offered the usual wage to the day laborers. The landowner is hiring workers and paying them fairly. The first group of day laborers were hired at about 6:00 AM and told that they would be paid a fair wage for their day’s labor.

After this the landowner then came out at 9:00 AM, and he saw other people standing idle in the marketplace. So, the landowner invited these people to come and work in His vineyard. Not only this, once again, the landowner then does this again at 12:00 PM and 3:00 PM. The landowner gathers these idle people and tells them that they will be paid “whatever is right,” or perhaps “fair” for their work in His vineyard. Beyond this, the landowner then comes back out at 5:00 PM, and says to others standing in the marketplace, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” These people then once again, say because they have not been hired as day laborers. The landowner then hires these people and tells them to go into His vineyard and work. To review then, a landowner who has a vineyard hires day

laborers at 6:00 AM, 9:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 3:00 PM, and 5:00 PM. This is probably for the grape harvest, which is a lot of work.

So, the workday in the vineyard is now over, and some people have clearly worked many more hours than others. In fact, some workers have worked substantially more hours than others. The laborers are then told to come get their pay for their day's labor. I imagine a desk and a box of money, and the landowner calls the day laborers forward. The landowner, however, calls the workers from the latest hired in the day, or last, and then down to the first hired in the morning to get paid. So, those hired at 5:00 PM get their pay first, and then down to those hired first at 6:00 AM. When the people that got hired for the day at 5:00 PM get paid though, the landowner pays them for an entire day of work. In fact, all of the day laborers that landowner hired for the day, from those hired at 6:00 AM all the way up until 5:00 PM all got paid the same amount. When the earliest day laborers that were hired were paid, they thought they would get paid more than the workers that were hired later in the morning or the day. Everyone, once again though, got paid the same amount. Some grumbled or got frustrated with the landowner over this. In fact, it says in the Matthew 20:12 once again, "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."

If we think about it, the day laborers, especially the ones hired early on do have a reason to be frustrated that they worked as much as twelve hours and got the same pay as laborers that worked as little as one hour. So how does the landowner, who is God, respond to this? In Matthew 20:13-14 the landowner says once again, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I chose to give to this last the same as I am give you.’ In fact, the landowner continues saying in Matthew 20:15, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous.” Then of course this story of “The Laborers in the Vineyard” ends with the landowner, who is God, saying this once again in Matthew 20:16, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

As we walk this “Road to Redemption” together in this season of Lent, to the cross of Christ on Good Friday, we can turn to him. We can turn him when we are six years old or at six in the morning. We can turn to Christ we are twenty-years old, or at nine in the morning. We can turn to Christ we are forty-years old, or at twelve in the afternoon. We can turn to Christ when we are sixty-five years old, or at three in the afternoon. We can also turn to Christ when we are ninety-years old, or at five in the afternoon. The great thing about Jesus Christ our Lord, is that whenever we turn to Him, whenever we surrender to Him, and whenever we give our lives to him, we all get the same reward. For we are fallen, we are all in

need of a savior, and because of this, no matter how long we work on this earth in God's vineyard, if we come to His son Jesus Christ, the reward will be the same. We will receive the same forgiveness, we will receive the same mercy, and we embrace the same payment for our sins, through Jesus Christ. If we were to line up and go into heaven today, even those that just met Jesus, will get the same reward as those of us that have known Christ for years. As the last shall we first and first shall be last.

What Jesus is telling us all this morning then, is "Embrace His Grace and Love." If we are truly to going to turn to Christ, then we must be loving, forgiving, and we must treat all people the same. The last time I looked we are all in the same boat, as we are all fallen, and we all need Jesus. Humility, hope, mission, love, grace, and mercy is what should fill us, and what should fill the church. When they do, the church will be unstoppable, and the devil will flee. Here is a good picture that depicts our gospel of Matthew 20:1-16 reading for this morning:

Slide 11 – (“Laborers In The Vineyard – Matthew 20:16 - Picture”)



God the Father, calls us to His son Jesus. He calls us early in the morning and even call us up to the very end of day that is our lives. If we answer that call, and if we come to Jesus, we will all receive the same wage, the same grace, and the same love. As a result, we should not be envious, jealous, or angry with each other. We are called to love and be like Jesus Christ. In this season of Lent, on this day, in this moment, may we all “Embrace God’s Grace and Love.”

In looking at how this applies to our lives today, let us review again what we just discussed:

Slide 12 – (“Application to Our Lives # 1”)

Application to Our Lives # 1

- A landowner hires workers at different times of the day (3rd, 6th, 9th, and 11th hours) to work in his vineyard, promising to pay them fairly. When the time comes to pay, he gives the same wage to all workers, regardless of when they started working.

If we come to Jesus today, years ago, or whenever, the reward is the same. We will be shown grace, mercy, love, and receive salvation.

For example, in the story or the parable for this morning, the landowner who represents God is full of grace and generosity. God gives us grace and generosity abundantly, whenever we come to His son Jesus. If we have known Jesus for years, and if we know someone that just came to Him, we are to celebrate, not be envious or angry. For whenever they come to Christ, another soul has been saved.

Slide 13 – (“Application to Our Lives # 2”)

Application to Our Lives # 2

- **God's Grace:** The parable emphasizes God's grace and generosity, as the landowner is free to give what he chooses, even if it seems unfair to those who worked longer.
- **No Basis for Envy:** The parable is meant to discourage envy and resentment among those who have been faithful for a longer time, as those who come later are not penalized for their late arrival.

Lastly, we are to trust in God, and to trust in God's grace. Even if we do not always understand what God is doing, or why He is going it, we are to trust Him. Here is the thing brothers and sisters, I have read the book through, at the end of the book, righteousness wins, grace wins, faith wins, kindness wins, and evil, malice, and darkness will be destroyed. God will never leave us or forsake us, we need to put our full trust in Jesus. When we do this, we have freedom like we have never had before, and we will have spiritual courage that can move mountains. As I said a few weeks ago, nothing scares the devil more than strong faith in Christ, and a strong and united church.

Slide 14 – (“Application to Our Lives # 3”)

Application to Our Lives # 3

- **Trust in God's Grace: We should trust in God's grace and mercy, even when we don't understand His ways.**
- **Avoid Envy: We should not envy those who seem to have an easier path to faith or who are rewarded more quickly.**
- **Strive to be like God: We should strive to be fair and generous in our dealings with others, as God is with us.**

As I call the praise team forward, let us this day and always “Embrace God’s Grace and Love?” Why, because Jesus wins in the end, I know because I have read the book through. Come to Him and live and then live to love and serve others. Whenever we make the decision to do this, we will all get the same grace, love, and the same payment. For Jesus Christ is mighty to save. Amen.