



## Thoughts For The Week

### *Philippians 2:1–13*

*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*

*September 30, 2014*

Scriptures: Isaiah 55: 6-9 • Philippians 1: 20-24, 27 • Matthew 20: 1-16

I don't often stop to have a meal at McDonald's, Burger King or other such "fancy" eateries, but when I am pressed for time I may rush up, grab a burger, a coke and fries, consuming it as best I can on the way to wherever I am going. Of course fast food venues are always convenient when I am in a hurry, but I'm always left a bit disappointed, even saddened for the folks who work the counter or the window. They are mostly young adults simply trying to get along; it's a job, after all even though the salary is not that great. Nonetheless, if it were possible I would vote for a raise in salary for them. Maybe not to the levels they want but more than what they are paid now.

This was an issue in the U.S. Congress some months ago, a raise in the minimum wage. Unfortunately or fortunately depending on your point of view, the proposal went nowhere in congress; it would hurt business! It has, however, become a major issue in several states in recent months. Washington State, for instance raised the minimum salary to \$10.00 an hour.

So, all this leads us to ask, what is a fair pay in any sort of work that an individual does? Many individuals in big business or industry take home millions, not for the hard physical work they do but for what they know or for the influence and power they have. Again, that leads us to ask, what is fair in this world of work and competition? Most would think that a hard day's work done with honest effort deserves something. Of course, that's not always the way it works in this tough old world.

Of course, we wouldn't be human if we didn't consider our talents or our work as prize-worthy as someone else's. After all, who wants to be second in anything? Would any talented athlete strive for the bronze medal at the next Olympics, for second or third in the next NFL season, in tennis at Wimbledon or at the U.S. Open? That would be craziness.

Now all this is not simply a theoretical question. Most of us, in whatever endeavor we participate would like to win first place. Of course, there is only one first place, no matter how hard one works. Someone has to be satisfied with second or third or nothing. The question that often arises is this? Where was God in my second place award? Didn't God have any idea how hard I worked on this project? If God is fair, where was the fairness in this?

Interestingly, Jesus brings up the issue of fairness in the parable of the vineyard workers who were hired for just wages at various times of the day, some early, some late. The early birds obviously got their promised pay. What bothered them, of course, was that the last-hired individuals received the same pay as they did. "The owner wasn't fair," they said. "By rights, we ought to get more, we worked longer and harder in the sun."

The point they did not seem to understand, of course, was that they actually did receive what they were promised. They were just a little jealous over the amount the last-hired received. "No fair!"

The lesson Jesus seems to be teaching here is that life doesn't always seem fair, or at least not fair in the way we see it. Of course, we don't always have control over life's circumstances, so, why should we complain?

Obviously there is always some reason for the way life's events happen. We may not know what it is, but there is a reason and usually someone else knows what that reason is.

My personal sense is that Jesus is comparing the vineyard owner to God. God is always fair in the way God deals with us. The problem (or the mystery) is that we don't know what's behind the decision in question. Life is mysterious. Perhaps we should simply say life is cluttered. No one is trying to hurt us. It's just that we don't always understand the motivation behind decisions over which we have no control. The moment we try to compare ourselves to others, of course, we already have problems; there will always be differences in talent, ability and experience. There are not many "equals" in this life.

Perhaps then, the solution (if there is a solution) is that if we have truly striven we should be thankful for what we received, whether it's first, second or third place. We did our best and even that should be considered a reward. The ways of God are always just but they are not always comprehensible. So too in the world of human competition: Decisions do not always seem just to us, but I'm also pretty sure that God has nothing to do with that.

*Happy Birthday Audrey (9/30)*

## **Prayer For The Week**

We give thanks to you Lord God, and praise your mighty works of peace.

We pray for all people in their daily lives and work: for our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone. We pray for this community, the nations, and especially for the people of Belarus. Be with them as they struggle to overcome the problems that beset them and build a nation where peace and justice are known.

We pray for peace and unity among the leaders of religions and nations, and for all who work for justice and peace.

We pray for the special needs of those here gathered. Guide us, we humbly ask. We confess our shortcomings. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone.

We thank you for our many blessings this day and pray that the Holy Spirit will be with us as we seek to know and do your will. In the name of the Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.

## Stewardship Thought For The Week

The gospel relates Jesus telling a “great crowd” that “...anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” A few of Jesus’ immediate disciples, such as Peter, John and James, did just that: They responded to Jesus’ call, renouncing everything to follow him.

How do we as modern disciples of Jesus respond when confronted with this outwardly harsh command of Jesus? Surely the rejection of possessions need not mean literally giving all one’s possessions away, does it?

Maybe what we should be really asking ourselves this week is: Do our possessions keep us from encountering Christ in our daily lives? Do they distract us from our Community of Christ family? Do our possessions interfere with our personal & business relationships? Do they make us insensitive to those less fortunate? These are all life altering questions for most of us.