

It's Not Fair
Matthew 20:1-16

What does it take for a painting to be a great work of art? ... Its age? It has to have been painted in the 1600's or before? Who the painter was? Does it have to have been painted by someone whose name we recognize? Its size? Can a painting the size of a postcard or one that takes up a whole wall possibly be considered a masterpiece? It's very difficult to put into words what makes for great art. And so we have the often used saying: "I can't describe it, but I know it when I see it."

How does that compare to our sense of fairness – of what is fair and what is not? Most of us would be hard pressed to put it into words, but we know it when we see it.

It is unfair that a married couple tries for years to have a child but can't, but then two strangers come together for a one night stand and she gets pregnant. It's just not right!

It is not fair that one sibling goof's off at school and puts in the bare minimum of effort and gets A's while the brother or sister pays attention and works hard but gets B's or C's. It's just not right!

It is not fair that an employee who is honest, competent, and loyal to the company is passed over

for a promotion which instead is given to a less competent liar and backstabber. It's just not right!

You have experienced your own share of unfairness. You are not alone. Here are some complaints of unfairness from names you recognize:

Elijah – *"I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too"* (1 Kings 19:10) It's just not right!

Jeremiah – *Righteous are you, O LORD, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive* (Jeremiah 12:1)? It's just not right!

The Psalms are full of questions like this addressed to God: *"How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked"* (82:2)? It's just not right!

We recognize unfairness when we see it and don't like it. We can understand the grumbling of the workers who were hired early in the morning: *"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."* They weren't

treated fairly. But is that what we want from God?
Do we want God to be fair?

There are people we want to be fair: teachers, bosses,
judges. But do we really want God to be fair?

Just a little bit ago we sang these three hymn stanzas
(LSB 55:2-4):

What God did in His Law demand
And none to Him could render
Caused wrath and woe on ev'ry hand
For man, the vile offender.
Our flesh has not those pure desires
The spirit of the Law requires,
And lost is our condition.

It was a false, misleading dream
That God His Law had given
That sinners could themselves redeem
And by their works gain heaven.
The Law is but a mirror bright
To bring the inbred sin to light
That lurks within our nature.

From sin our flesh could not abstain,
Sin held its sway unceasing;
The task was useless and in vain,
Our guilt was e'er increasing.
None can remove sin's poisoned dart
Or purify our guileful heart--
So deep is our corruption.

Do we really want God to be fair? ... No, and He
isn't – especially to His only-begotten Son.

Talk about unfair! Did Jesus deserve to be beaten
and spit upon? What did Jesus do that He deserved
to have a crown of thorns crushed down onto His
head and have His hands and feet nailed to a cross?
Nothing! He was the sinless Son of God. He did not
deserve to suffer and die. But He chose to do it for
your sake.

Sin's price had to be paid. As a just judge, God the
Father demanded it. As your loving Father, He chose
His Son to pay the price for you. Sin can't be
ignored, and that is why God the Father turned His
back on His Son as He hung on the cross, causing
Jesus to cry out, "My God, My God, why have you
forsaken me?"

The Father was unfair to His Son, Jesus, so He can
be generous with you. What you have not earned, He
has been given to you as a gift – forgiveness of sins
and life eternal with your Lord! What you would
search for in vain has been placed in your heart – the
peace and joy that comes from knowing Jesus has
restored you to a right relationship with His Father.
He will not treat you as your sins deserve, but will be
generous with His gifts of mercy and grace. Thanks
be to God that He is not fair!