

**Lessons for The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**September 24, 2023**

Psalm 27:1–9 ~ *David prayed confident of God's protection and triumph over his enemies.*

Isaiah 55:6–9 ~ *When we expect God's mercy to be at an end, He still stands ready to pardon.*

Philippians 1:12–14, 19–30 ~ *Even from his prison cell, St. Paul knew God would spread His Gospel.*

Matthew 20:1–16 ~ *God's unexpected mercy to the undeserving should make us thankful, not resentful!*

**GATHERING THE TEXTS:** The High Ways of God

We may hold ourselves to high standards, but God's ways are higher than ours. We may think we are pushing forgiveness to the limit, but God will have mercy and freely pardon long after our patience has been exhausted. The Apostle Paul had seen God's grace at work among the Christians in Philippi when they came to believe in Jesus. He rejoiced to see it still at work while he was imprisoned and they continued to be partners with him in telling the gospel message. Jesus' parable points out that often we don't rejoice when we see God's grace extended to those we think are less deserving of his mercy than we are. These are the high ways of God's grace.

**PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE:** Most gracious God, you always seek my return when I have wandered; you freely pardon me when I have sinned against you. Give me joy in your presence, and help me rejoice when others are surprised by your mercy in Christ Jesus. Amen.

**STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT:** When life is given away lavishly, it comes back abundantly!

**OFFERING PRAYER:** God of mercy, we are filled with praise for your commands and thanksgiving for Your great and generous gifts. As we have received, so move us to give, works from our hands, the love of our hearts, and praise on our lips. Amen.

**CONVICTION AND COMFORT:** We see ourselves in the grumbling workers of Jesus' parable as our jealousy is directed against those we judge less worthy of God's favor than we, for whatever reason. Jesus' parable quickly points out, that we are instead the ones who have received unbelievable mercy! For we are the last and the least who have been given the riches of the kingdom. That message demands our eager sharing!

**Questions to Consider:** Forgiveness is free, but not cheap.

- What is God waiting for when we reach the end of our patience with our neighbors?
- How was St. Paul able to be patient even in suffering?
- Who do you identify with, one of the early workers in the vineyard or one of the late comers?
- What is the most surprising thing about the Gospel?