



ABOUT THE PROPERs

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 20

September 20, 2026



*Unexpected Truths
Grace Is Amazing*

Human beings have an incredibly strong sense of fairness. That is why it can be so perplexing when we see how God dispenses blessing and grace. We see people who mock God who are more prosperous than believers. We see people who convert on their deathbed, and Scripture tells us they obtain the same salvation as someone who has been Christian all his life. How is that fair? Through a simple story, Jesus teaches us a profound truth. We need to stop expecting God to be fair. God is not fair. He does not give us what we deserve, and that's called mercy. In fact, he gives us what we don't deserve, and that's called grace. No, God is not fair. He is merciful and gracious!

First Lesson ¹

Jonah 3:10 – 4:11

Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed; in his mind it would only be fair. Nineveh was wicked, bloodthirsty, and feared. Jonah had not wanted to prophesy to them because he was afraid that they might listen and repent. Jonah knew what that would mean: God would have compassion on them and forgive them (Jonah 4:4). But God is far more gracious than Jonah could have even imagined. The LORD taught his prophet with a vine and made a striking point. Jonah, though you had no part in the creation, growth, or life of this vine, yet you were so emotionally attached to it. But think of me, Jonah! Those people, those children—even those cows!—I made them; I sustain them; I want them to be mine forever. So great is my grace!

Second Reading ¹

Romans 9:6-16

Is God fair? Is God just? Neither—he is inconceivably gracious, as our eternal election proves. Paul answers the question by pointing us back to God's speech to Moses in Exodus 33. The Israelites had worshiped the golden calf, and Moses made intercession for them. Moses asked the LORD to show him his ways (v 13) and his glory (v14). God's responded by declaring his inconceivable grace: he would show mercy and grace to those he chose, regardless of any merit or worth. Though these people had abandoned him, he would be merciful and gracious to them. So also with us, the children of the faith of Abraham: God's eternal election of us to salvation had nothing to do with merit or worth or works, but only stems from his inconceivable grace and mercy.

Gospel ¹

Matthew 20:1-16

What is our God like? Jesus teaches us with a story, but we struggle with the lesson. The parable offends our finely honed sense of what's fair and what's not. Note the context: the disciples had just asked what they would receive in the kingdom, and Jesus promised them twelve thrones. Then he immediately quashes any prideful thoughts by saying that in the kingdom of heaven, God makes no distinction by merit or work (*For the kingdom of heaven is like...*). In reality, God is not fair; rather, he is inconceivably gracious. One-hour-workers receive the same as those who bore the heat of the day. This parable carries both warning and promise for us—a warning that all comparisons based on merit or work do not belong in God's kingdom; a promise that our relationship with God is based solely on grace which he lavishes in abundance. The story only offends our sense of fairness when we compare ourselves to other workers. Even though they were promised twelve thrones, Jesus wouldn't allow his disciples to make comparisons. How much less would he let us whose labor is so late and light? When we keep our eyes where they belong—fixed on God—then have a correct view of our worth and labor. Then, when God places a denarius in our hands, we can marvel that the Lord isn't fair—thanks be to God! He doesn't give us what we deserve; no, he gives us what we don't.

Psalm of the Day ⁴

Psalm 115 A

“Not to Us, O LORD”

The Church sings Psalm 115 in services that emphasize our humility in view of God’s grace. It was traditionally sung after the Passover meal. Martin Luther said, “Psalm 115 is a psalm of thanks. It praises God for being the true helping God, with all other gods identified as vain idols which cannot help us. We are taught not to look at how religious and respectable we are, but instead we look to the glory of God and to his name for our salvation.”

Gospel Acclamation

Ephesians 2:8

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, you call us to work in your kingdom and promise to reward us according to your grace. Help us to rid our minds of worldly expectations and rejoice that you freely pour out the blessings of salvation to all people; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

558 “Salvation unto Us Has Come” (Paul Speratus, 1484-1551)

Church Year Season ¹

Season after Pentecost

After reliving the great events of the life of Christ, the worshipping Church spends half a year focusing on the teachings of Christ. The Church wears green during the season of Pentecost as the Spirit uses those teachings of Jesus to grow the faith of believers. The appointed lessons cover a great body of doctrine for faith and life.

Minor Festivals

St. Matthew, Apostle (September 21)

Colors & Symbolism

Green

Green is the color of life, refreshment, growth, and regeneration. Whereas the first half of the Church Year (the “Festival Half” or the “Half Year of Our Lord”) focused on the life of Christ during his earthly ministry, the emphasis for the second half (the “Non-Festival half” or the “Half Year of the Church”) shifts to the result of Christ’s work through the Word: the work of defining and creating faith, and inspiring its fruits. The theme of the Christian’s growth in faith (like healthy green plants) fills the season.

Nain Paraments

Sundays after Pentecost

Superfrontal: When Isaiah was called to be a prophet of the LORD, two seraphs (a class of angels) appeared and called out to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:3). The threefold repetition of the divine adjective emphasizes the infinite holiness of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some congregations count the Sundays in this season of the Church Year as the Sundays after the festival of the Holy Trinity, calling it the “Trinity season,” or the “Sundays after Trinity.” That is why most paraments for this season feature symbols of the Holy Trinity.

Lectern antependium: The equilateral triangle is one of the oldest emblems of the Holy Trinity. The three equal sides and angles represent the equality, unity, and co-eternal nature of the three persons of the Trinity. Though they are three distinct persons, they are of one essence as one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). The three interwoven circles represent the three members of the Trinity and emphasize their unity and eternal nature; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are without beginning or end.

Pulpit antependium: At each point of the triangle (the significance of the triangle is explained above) is a nimbus, Latin for *cloud*. The nimbus appears as a circle, or a halo. In Christian artwork, nimbi surround the head of the Father (when he is depicted as a human), Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit (when he is depicted as a dove) to signify their glory and holiness. In artistic depictions of believers (saints), nimbi are placed around their heads to show that they have been made holy by God’s grace in Christ and through faith. The three fish in between the nimbi and that meet in the middle of the triangle signify Christians who are united to the Triune God by faith. Fish have come to represent the followers of Jesus because believers have been brought into the ship of God’s church through the efforts of those who proclaim Gospel (cf. “fishers of men” in Matthew 4:19).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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