Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

God’s unconditional grace can make us uncomfortable. Take Jonah as an example. God gave word to Jonah to go immediately to the great city of Nineveh and to cry out against it because God has seen their wickedness. This made Jonah so uncomfortable that he took immediate action -- to hop on a ship that was far away to a place far from Nineveh. God made a great wind and the ship was about to break up. The sailor’s determined the storm was because of Jonah so they picked Jonah up and threw him in the sea and the seas became calm - they were right. When they saw what had happened they were uncomfortable and feared the Lord even more and they offered a sacrifice to God. How uncomfortable was this to Jonah, being thrown in a raging sea. Think for a moment being in the middle of major storm? But God then provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah where Jonah was in his belly for three days and three nights. Not finding comfort in the belly of the fish Jonah prayed and accepted deliverance belongs to the Lord. So, the Lord talked to the fish and the fish vomited Jonah out unto dry land. Some might say the moral of the story is you can’t keep a good man down! But this is not the end of the story. Now Jonah agrees to go to Nineveh and tell people they will be overthrown in 40 days. Jonah walked across the city to give the message and they responded to this and changed their ways and dressed in sackcloth and the king of Nineveh who also sat in ashes declared that people should fast and turn from their evil ways and violence hoping God would turn from God’s fierce anger and they would not perish. Because God saw them turn away from their evil deeds God changed his mind and did not bring calamity on them. Jonah is not comfortable with God giving mercy to the people of Nineveh. It can be hard to accept the wideness of God’s mercy.

On the other hand, I think part of our human nature makes it difficult to accept remarkable grace from others. I am defining grace as unearned love and kindness. I think we have been there. When I was in elementary school probably the first grade I would walk to and from school. One day a friend invited to his house to play on the way home. I went to play with him and quite a while after this my parents arrived at my friends and they were really angry. I got chewed out for not telling my parents where I was at and then my mother hugged me. When we got home I was told to go to bed without supper. In about a half an hour later my mother brou8ght me dinner. Did I deserve to get punished? Even though I did not intentionally cause them to worry -- absolutely. But the consequences were met with cts of love. Grace is someone overlooking something we have said or done even though it may not be deserved.

Today’s parable tells us how heaven is like and can make us also feel uncomfortable. The laborers, who were readily available in the ancient world and often lived on the edge who came in the early morning hours and were last to get paid, grumbled against the landowner (in the kingdom of heaven-God) because they baked all day in the scorching heat while those who stood idle because no one hired them. Yet they were paid the same amount. How can that be fair to those that started work earlier in the day would be paid the same? These laborers are ill-at-ease with the landowner’s choice “to give to this last the same as I give to you.” If you labored all day and those that just worked at the end of the day received the same pay, wouldn’t that fry your bacon? This certainly challenges conventional structures and practices. God in essence them “Is your eye evil because I am good? The early laborers were paid what they were promised. I think God’s grace that opens us up to God’s unconditional love and grace so we will be justified is good news because we are rewarded not by our good works or how long or what degree we believe because God does not keep score. If someone else is saved even though we could question this in our minds this is good news because we are saved. Like Jonah, they are uncomfortable with the unchecked mercy offered by the landowner/God. God doesn’t play by our rules, and that can be very discomforting for us all. I remember a cartoon where a quite couple is in a night club while at the next table there is a man who has had several drinks and is surrounded by many women while smoking a cigar and the man said to his wife “I hope there is an afterlife.” What would make them uncomfortable is this man is saved even though they feel they are righteous, which is really self-righteousness.

Our discomfort with grace shows up in all sorts of ways. It can be discomforting for us to engage the hungry and the poor and the outcast of our society. It can be discomforting for us to welcome all people into our faith community regardless of how people may judge them. It can be discomforting to address the lack of justice that still surrounds us. And finally, it can be very discomforting for us to open our lives to the transforming power of the cross of Christ, whereby “the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Could it be that the more uncomfortable we become with the reckless love of God, the closer we are to understanding the meaning of grace?

Amen.