**Exodus 16:2-15**

**Philippians 1:21-30**

**Matthew 20:1-16**

 Good morning. I’m glad you’re here on what is a sad day for this family of faith. I’m glad we can be together.

 The parables of Jesus seldom have a moral. But today’s text is different. The moral of the story is that life is not fair: the last to come got the same reward as the first. That’s not fair. This is probably the very first life lesson most of us learn. It isn’t fair that you have to go to bed when you’re not sleepy and Mom and Dad get to stay up. There are any number of injustices you suffer at the hands of siblings or on the playground growing up. We learn early and bitterly that life isn’t fair.

 We all learned it again last week at the tragic death of one of our own by gunshot. You personally may not have known Micah Dancy, but if you’ve been around Nativity for longer than one or two weeks, you knew his parents, David and deese Dancy. Their youngest son was hanging out with a friend on Thursday night when the friend pointed what he thought was an unloaded gun at his best friend, pulled the trigger, and killed Micah.

 Yes, they were drinking. Isn’t that what 20-somethings do? Yes, there was marijuana in the house. Remember, marijuana is legal in our state and both young men were of legal age. And yes, they had no business horsing around with a gun. But haven’t we all done risky things? Maybe while driving, or playing sports, or balancing on a tipsy chair in the kitchen when you know full well you should be using a ladder. Any one of those things could harm us or lead to death.

We all do risky things. For the most part, we get away with them. Once in a while, luck runs out. What is so tragic about Micah’s death is that it’s just not fair.

This is a family that doesn’t own any guns. They have deep convictions about not killing. The peace sign is one of deese Dancy’s favorite emblems, whether as jewelry, on a tote bag, or as art in her house. This is a family that doesn’t really engage much in social drinking. I’ve seen David Dancy nurse one beer through a three-hour dinner party. That their son should die by a handgun just isn’t fair. That alcohol was involved seems unfair as well.

Most of us are in shock. We know these people. Some of you grew up with one of the Dancy boys, or your kids did, or your grandkids. That this could happen to one of our own, and to us, seems unreal.

Out of our shock come many things. Sorrow, of course, and grief. Most of us don’t know what to say or even what to think. We’re just numb. I’ve spent some hours over the last two days mindlessly surfing the web, with not a thought in my head. As I left home to come to church today with my purse in one hand and my hat in the other, I stood by the car door and said, “Where’s my hat?” Where-is-my-hat?” Oh, yeah, it’s in my hand.

Besides grief there’s also anger – not at any one person, necessarily; not at God, though it is understandable if someone is angry at God. What I’m talking about is generalized, unfocused anger that this could even happen. It isn’t fair. And then there’s confusion. Why do bad things happen to good people? As people of faith and goodness, shouldn’t the Dancy’s be spared this sort of thing?

Regrettably, there is no answer to these questions: to the why’s and the anger and confusion. There is no explanation or rationale to the utter unfairness of it. Life just doesn’t provide the printouts we wish we could get now and again. But what life does provide – if you’re willing to keep showing up – is here in this room. It is community.

Have you ever heard of the Cheerios effect? It comes from the world of fluid mechanics. It is the odd phenomenon of small objects, like coins, that normally sink in fluid but when in the company of other coins, they will float. And more than that, they attract one another, the way breakfast cereal clumps together in a bowl of milk. This floating and clumping is due to surface tension.

That’s what we are right now. We’re Cheerios. We’re going to float. We’re going to help each other float. We’re gonna help the Dancy’s float. And we’re gonna clump together as we float. Because what binds us together isn’t surface tension, but a deep, inner resolve that each one of us belongs to God. And God belongs to us. And not just us, but all things. It is our deepest conviction that the universe, notwithstanding hurricanes in Texas, devastation in Puerto Rico, and earthquakes in Mexico, is really good. The promises of God are new every morning, says the Psalms.

It is over the long haul; over the passing of time that we learn these things. The universe is for us; not against us – no matter what it may seem like at the moment. That God is with us, even going before us to lower the mountains and raise up the valleys so that we can walk safely and unafraid.

These are statements of faith. Not everyone accepts them. That’s OK. This is my faith. Because over the long haul of my life, I have seen the moral of the story – “That’s not fair!” – cut both ways.

Because at this very moment, Micah Dancy is enjoying the same eternal bliss as Mother Theresa. Not that he was better than her, or even as good as her. What do I know? Maybe Mother Theresa wasn’t as good as Micah Dancy! What I do know is that God lavishes goodness on us all, whether we’re at this business of life all day – like the first workers in the parable today – or just for an hour – like Micah. God pours out goodness and love whether we “deserve” it or not. God’s love isn’t fair. What it is, is un-measurable; un-exhaustable; endless and beyond wonderful.

That’s what Micah has right now. He is snug in the middle of golden bliss. It’s what we’ll all have one day. In the meantime, we need to be Cheerios and help each other float, and help each other remember that we belong to God and God belongs to us.