

Parables 9 – The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

¹“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘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.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?’ ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

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We’ve visited

The unforgiving slave
The shepherd who leaves the 99 in search of the 1 lost sheep
The good Samaritan
The mustard seed faith
The dishonest manager

Today, we end our focus on parables with “The Workers in the Vineyard”.

We remember that parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning.

The first 15 verses are earthly story and there is one final verse that points to the heavenly meaning.

The workplace is a setting based on fairness: work an hour – get paid an hour. When it works right the employer gets a fair hour’s work and the employee gets a fair hour’s wage. That’s the way it was in Jesus’ day and our expectation in our day.

And that’s what makes this parable so memorable: workers arrive at all hours of the day and still get paid a full day’s wage.

If we obsess about this from a workplace setting – we are in perpetual argument with it.

But, as we remember, parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning.

In this parable it seems clear that the landowner is God and the vineyard is Israel, the people of God. Those who come early and those who come late to the vineyard receive the same from God.

Not what they earn, but what God has to give

Love and mercy...in a word grace.

From a spiritual point of view, we all have fallen short of God's expectations. But we receive from God not damnation, but mercy.

Today we think about this as we have the vineyard holiday: Labor Day.

Thinking about our work – whether it is gainful employment or volunteer work or the work we do in our homes and with our families – we might use Charles Dickens' description: "...the best of times and the worst of times...."

In our places of labor we experience some moments of great joy and satisfaction, some times of great frustration and discouragement.

Reading this parable today causes us to ask "have I been aware of God's amazing grace at my places of work?"

In what ways have I be the last-hour worker and received a full day's pay? In what ways have I received mercy and grace?

I will never forget how you all have been graceful and merciful to me over the last four years. Checking in. Listening. Offering your help. Three months after my separation, two of you invited me to your homes on Christmas eve. (Normally after worship I was home and in bed within an hour. I think I got home at 1:30 early Christmas morning.) and another of you invited me to your home for Christmas dinner and said "stay as little or as long as you like!"

In what ways may I be the manager called to "pay" in abundant mercy and grace?

There are times when acting in mercy has the negative effect of enabling
--- someone who is irresponsible needs to have expectations and boundaries clarified

There are surprising moments to express God's amazing grace.

A member of our church told me that early in his career he was tasked to repossess a television set. As timing goes, it was a Saturday morning when he went to the home to reclaim the television set. There sat three little children watching cartoons. So what would you do? How might you express mercy in that moment? Express regret for the task at hand? Ask for a cup of coffee and give the children another hour of cartoons? Talk with the mother about her finances and offer places where she might get help? Invite her to your church?

In each of our lives there are unexpected moments when we may offer grace and mercy.

Early one morning at the beginning of May, I heard a knock at the clubhouse door. Little did I know that answering this knock would soon put me into a search and rescue mode. The knocking homeowner, David Mayo, indicated that there was a mother duck in the pool with her little ducklings. Having lowered the water level for grouting work to be completed that week, we created a quandary for the small offspring. The mama had no trouble getting in and out of the pool, but the babies were trapped. David and I started skimming the 14 ducklings out of the pool as the mama squawked her discontent. After many attempts, the mother duck caught on. She would hop in the pool, swim until the young ones formed their line behind her, and guide them to us to scoop out. It was amazing how she understood we were not predators, and only wanted to help her. After the last baby was secured in the box, David carried them over to the Springbrooke pond, across Hurstbourne Parkway, with the mama following all the way. Now that's one morning in the life of a property manager!¹

As we end this worship focus on parables, perhaps one of the insights we've gained is that in some ways all of our lives are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning.

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http://springhurstonline.com/store/product_images/uploaded_files/Newsletter_Vol_1_Iss_4_June_15,_2011.pdf