

We turn now to the gospel lesson for the day. We have been reading along through the gospel of Matthew over the past several weeks. Today we venture into the 20th chapter.

There are some passages of Scripture which are meant to bring us comfort or reassurance. This is not one of those passages. This is a passage which is meant to leave us disturbed.

This is a parable that some of us may know. But I am going to ask you to set aside the way you have maybe heard this particular passage interpreted for you.

Sometimes Scriptures are interpreted so narrowly that we miss other interpretations that God is yearning for us to discover. Parables that Jesus tells are meant to have several layers of meaning attached to them.

Traditionally this text that we are about to read has been interpreted through Christian eyes to reassure us 21st Century Christians that our place in God's kingdom is as secure as the disciples who knew Jesus personally.

The ones of us who come into the faith story later are as equally important as those who came to faith in Jesus early. That is one faithful way to interpret this text. But today I am going to invite us to discover some other learnings from this scripture.

As part of this reading I am also going to read the last verse from chapter 19. You will see that this parable that Jesus tells is bordered by the same phrase.

Before this text we have the story of the disciples telling Jesus that they have left everything in order to follow him. Let us listen to what Jesus says to them and how he concludes the parable that we are about to read.

Read Matthew 19:30-20:16

I want to show a short clip from the Charlie Brown Christmas Special as Sally prepares her Christmas list for Santa.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyGHjxsr28o>

All Sally wants is her fair share. In this parable that we have read we see some workers complaining that they are not getting their fair share. This is my favorite parable whenever I show up late to do volunteer work. I love referring to this passage and reminding folks that Jesus tells a parable in which the ones who show up at the end get the same salary as the ones who show up at the beginning.

In this parable, a grape grower needs some day laborers. So, he goes over to the labor pool and he hires the first set of laborers at the beginning of the day. The grower realizes that he needs some more laborers and so he shows back up at the labor pool at 9 am. He returns at noon and at 3:00.

The laborers in this story are not made out to be the most conscientious workers. Each time the grower shows up at the labor pool they are standing around idle. We don't know why they are idle.

If you know anything about labor pools you may know the stories of people who show up at labor pools, hire undocumented immigrants, work them all day, but then refuse to pay them after a full day of work. Since the workers are undocumented they have no legal recourse.

Maybe all the years of being taken advantage of by the privileged have left the workers in our parable with no real sense of ambition.

But the grower will show up one more time around 5:00 pm and hire a few more workers. When it is time to pay the workers, the grower decides to pay the workers first that only worked one hour. He pays these workers the usual daily wage of one denarius. These men who worked for only one hour were excited to receive a full day's pay.

Upon seeing this, the ones who worked the full day become very excited. If this grower is paying the ones that worked for one hour this amount then he is going to pay us very well. But much to their surprise the grower pays the ones that worked 3 hours the same amount of one denarius.

This same amount is paid to the ones who come at noon and the ones who came at 9 am. The ones that came at the beginning of the day become furious.

“You are paying us the same amount that you are paying the guys that only worked one hour? That is so totally not fair. We deserve to be paid more.”

But the grower reminds the laborers that he is paying them what he promised that he would pay them. When he hired them at the start of the day they were promised that they would get a regular day's pay. And that is what they receive. But these laborers are angry.

And we would be angry as well. We would be angry as well if we felt like we did all the work in the vineyard and we received the same pay as the person who barely touched a shovel.

And there are many of us here who act like those day long laborers who have worked the full day. There are some of us here who act that way in our marriages, in our jobs, in our volunteering, and in the ministry we do at the church.

Have you ever found yourself complaining that you are doing all the work but that others are not picking up their end of the rope? Have you ever complained about your co-workers that they are not doing their job?

Have you ever complained that you do more in your marriage relationship than your spouse? Have you ever volunteered your time in the community and complained that you do all the work in your organization? Have you ever volunteered your time at the church and complained that you are doing all the work?

My hunch is that there are many of us in this room who have complained at least once in our life that we are the only one doing all the work at home, job, charity, or in the church. If you have ever complained dramatically that you are doing all the work then this is a parable which should make you feel very uncomfortable.

In this parable that Jesus tells the ones who do all the work receive the same compensation as the ones who show up at the end. Is this fair? Are we like Charlie Brown's sister Sally demanding our fair share?

But demanding fairness in life is not God's intention for the way we are to live our lives. Life in God's realm is not about fairness. Life in God's realm is about generosity.

I was in a certification program one time working in a hospital in Columbia. One of my colleagues named Jim worked very hard to achieve the certification which we both received as hospital chaplains. He did all that was asked of him and went above and beyond to achieve his certification. He was very proud of what he accomplished.

Another one of our colleagues did not work very hard. He spent a lot of time slacking off as we would say. But when he got to the end of the program he also received the same certification. Jim commented to me that he felt that his certification was just devalued because our other colleague received the same certification as well but he did not work as hard.

But Jim is not the only one like that. Many of us have complained that we work harder than anyone else and we are frustrated and angry that others are not pulling their weight. Many of us assume that others are going to work as hard as we do and have the same goals and ambitions that we have.

But I came across an interesting quote this week that really made me think. "Assumptions are planned resentments. Assumptions are planned resentments. Whenever we assume anything, we set ourselves up for possible disappointment or even worse we set the other person, place, or thing up as the object of our disappointment, anger, or resentment."

If we assume that others will be like us then we are setting the stage for some type of resentment toward them.

There is nothing fair about this parable. But what is clear is that this is a parable about generosity. In the parable, the grower chooses to be generous to everyone. It doesn't matter how much they have worked. They will all be the recipient of the generosity which the grower seeks to share.

If we find ourselves resentful that others are not pulling their weight then we must ask ourselves about our own motivations. Why are we doing what we are doing? Is it to do good? Is it to do a good job? Is it to please God? Or do we do what we are doing for the accolades and the compensation?

In the realm of God, we do what we do for a higher calling. We do what we do because God loves us and we experience that grace and generosity in our lives.

If we find ourselves resentful that others are not pulling their weight then this parable tells us to get over it. Get over it because God is grace filled. God is generous. God invites us to be grateful people.

It's not about us and what is fair for you and me. It is about God and God's grace, love, and generosity. AMEN.

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-Quote from Feasting on the Word commentary 16th Sunday after Pentecost

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