

Wow! The workers who show up at the end of the day are paid exactly the same as those who started working early in the morning! What kind of employer would reward their workers in that way? I can just imagine – the very next day, NO ONE would show up early, would they! If they knew they'd all be paid the same, they'd ALL wait till the last hour to show up!

What's going on? Jesus begins by saying, 'the kingdom of heaven is like *this*.' So the parable is a picture of what God's kingdom is like. Let's look at the characters and try to figure out who they represent: first, we have the **Landowner** - it makes sense to conclude that the Landowner is God – the one who holds the power and makes the decisions for the vineyard. **The vineyard** is God's kingdom – it's where the vines grow and are nourished and the fruit is harvested – it's where the work is done. **The workers** are God's people – those who arrive early AND those who arrive late – all of God's people who have been invited into God's kingdom.

What else? Well, there is **work** being done in the vineyard-kingdom and there are **wages** paid. What kind of "work" is to be done in God's vineyard, what are the "wages" God pays... and what's behind this idea of **paying everyone the same**, no matter when they show up?

Here's my take on it: **The work** is about the **stewardship** of the vineyard – taking care of what belongs to God. Growth and nourishment of God's Creation – the natural world (the air, the water and the land) – and God's living creatures: ourselves and each other, and all animals.

In Genesis 1:26 "God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." We've been given the **responsibility** to take good care of God's creation.

And it's about **bringing forth fruit** and **reaping the harvest** – enabling the good things of God's creation to flourish - and to sow good seed with extravagant generosity (remember the Parable of the Sower).

Pope Francis tweeted yesterday: “We are called to be instruments of God, so that our planet might be what he dreamed of when he created it, and correspond with his plans for peace, beauty and fullness.”

So that is the work. What are the wages? One traditional way of reading this parable is to think of the wages in terms of **salvation** – because it doesn’t matter *when* you come to faith, even if it’s on your death bed – the reward is the same: eternal life with God. Salvation isn’t something we earn, it’s a divine gift. And salvation doesn’t come in shades of grey – we don’t get varying amounts of it according to the number of days, months or years that we have trusted in the Lord Jesus. We receive the wage or we do not. Here in the parable, everyone who accepts the landowner’s offer gets the wage, no matter how long they’ve been working in the vineyard. God the landowner chooses to pay all of the workers equally, the first and the last.

No, this isn’t fair, by the standards of this world. But this parable isn’t about the way things work in this world – it’s about how God chooses to run **God’s economy** in God’s kingdom – with outrageous GENEROSITY and GRACE. What would our world look like if it operated wholly on generosity and grace?

God knows **our need to be included** in God’s grace. Notice that the Landowner keeps hiring more and more workers as he sees them standing idle – it’s not that *he* needs more laborers, it’s that he sees *their need* to be included, so he puts them to work. The world’s economy usually revolves around the need of the bosses or the demand of the consumers, but this story is pulled along by the need of the workers themselves.

The Landowner agreed with the workers to pay “the usual daily wage.” Each one received enough to live on for that day (kind of like what today we call a “living wage”). The workers in the vineyard who had arrived early saw that they were being paid the same as those who arrived late, and they began to grumble, because they thought they deserved more. The landowner asked the grumblers whether his generosity made them envious – and of course, it did.

Any sensible business person wouldn't pay all of their workers the same wage if they didn't work the same number of hours at the same job. It isn't "good business", is it.

Let me tell you a story about a man named Dan Price: Dan Price is the CEO of Gravity Payment, a credit card processing company: In 2015 he decided to raise the minimum annual salary of all of his employees to \$70,000. To make the numbers work, he cut his own salary from \$1.1 million down to \$70,000, the same as his lowest-paid employee. In interviews he has said, "I'm happier than I've ever been. It's way better for me to be part of a system **where people are having their needs being met**, even if I have less."

The company has grown, both in terms of staff and clients. And the benefits to his employees' lives have been invaluable. Before 2015, many of them struggled to make ends meet. Now, many are starting families and buying homes. One-third of Gravity workers have become debt-free, and two-thirds have significantly cut back on their debt. Two of his senior staffers quit in protest, saying the sudden pay hikes were unfair, and that junior workers would slack off. But actually, the opposite has been true. The junior colleagues work harder than before, easing everyone else's workload in the process.

A colleague at a competitor recently suggested to Price that if his company had adopted a more traditional business model, Price could become a billionaire and do a lot of good with that money. Price said, "He's telling me that the world needs another billionaire philanthropist, and I just don't know if that's the case. Because we've been relying on billionaire philanthropists for so long, and I don't really think that's working out very well for us. - I think we need to have companies where people are taken care of and given opportunities. And so that's more intriguing to me than trying to become a billionaire..."

Whether Dan Price knows it or not, the Holy Spirit sure seems to have nudged him to bring kingdom values into his company. The Good News that Jesus came to tell is that God's Kingdom is breaking in. The Gospel is about God's overflowing generosity of grace, which God wants to pour out among all people. It's about receiving God's grace with gratitude, and without demanding more. And it's called GRACE, because it's a gift that **no one** actually deserves.

A Blessing based on a Poem by Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

May you know:

God loves each of us the same—infininitely—
according to God's love, not our “deserving.”

God is free from our past:

God's love isn't determined by what we've done.

The devil wants you to fear

that God doesn't really forgive, doesn't just plain love, but demands some kind of
transaction,

some making up for something,

some reward or punishment.

Jesus will have none of it.

...he rips at our assuming to measure.

And our assuming that

we are owed more than others.

Listen: Everybody gets God's love, everybody the same.

Listen to your heart when I say that.

Everybody gets God's love just the same. Everybody.

Why do you fight against the infinity of God's love?

What is the fear, the hurt you hang onto?

What if you were to let go, and let God love?

What if there is no deserving, but only giving and receiving?

What if you are one of those who is given

way more than you earned?

Will you fuss... or just say thanks?

Amen.