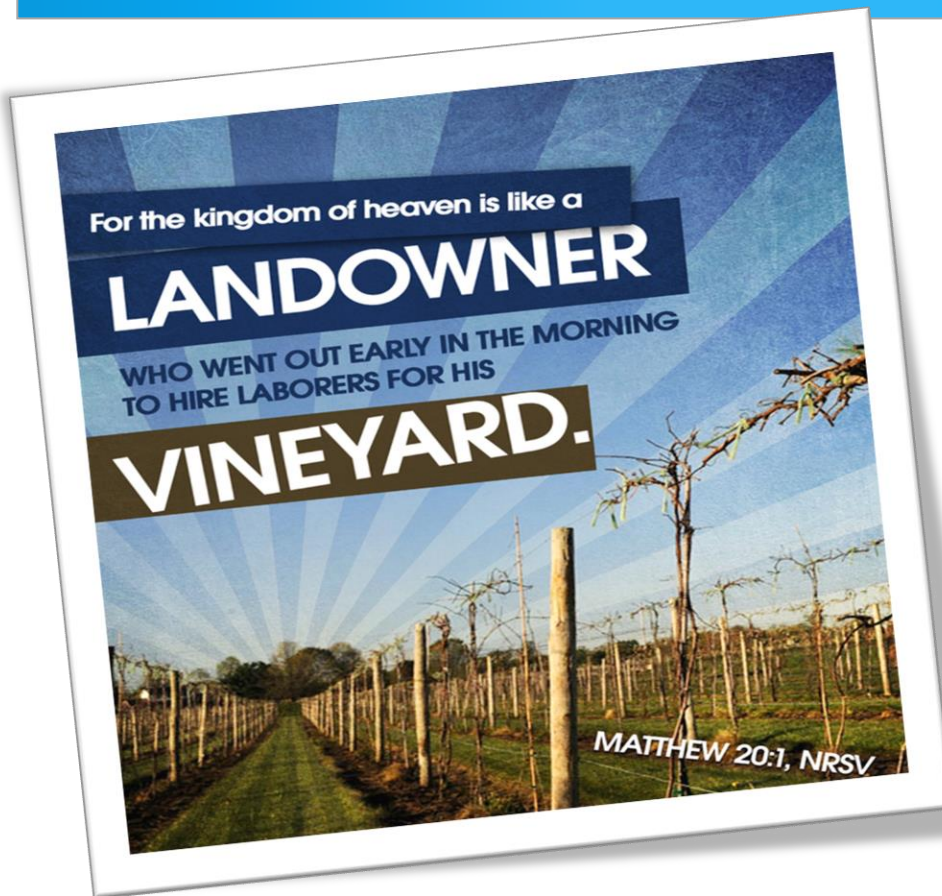


Faithnews

From Your Pastor



"Mercy and grace abound, don't miss them."



Is God Fair?

Matthew 20:1-6 9/20/2020

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he

saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4 and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. 5 When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. 6 And 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?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' 8 When 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.' 9 When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them

received the usual daily wage. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 saying, '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.' 13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what

belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"
16 *So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

Why did the vineyard owner pay wages to the last to arrive? He could have avoided the arguments by paying the first arrivals first and sending them on their way.

Jesus clearly says, "The first will be last and the last will be first." We read that quite a bit in the gospels. Entry into the kingdom is a reversal of what we expect. The end of the line becomes the beginning of the line.

In this parable, Jesus is pointing to grace and justice. I think the vineyard owner had that in mind when we made the early arrivals wait and watch. It's his to do with as he pleases. He uses moments like the pay window to teach about the kingdom.

The day laborer who worked only an hour and didn't even break a sweat received a whole denarius. We expect that those who worked three hours will get more, perhaps three denarii?

And those that worked all day...just wait and see what they receive!

That isn't what happened though. The vineyard owner was merciful and generous with the short-time workers. The others got nothing more. That's not justice, is it? It's the vineyard owner's money to do with what he pleases.

The problem in this parable is envy. The last to arrive get just what everyone else gets. And the first to arrive are envious.



Envy, that green-eyed monster, is dangerous and insidious. Advertisements point out that you're not enough without their product. Social Media uses envy to keep us connected in their community. We see our friends having wonderful vacations, buying new cars or whatever it is that we don't have.

Suddenly, we need a vacation or a new whatever. We're envious. We're not good enough. We need more.

What used to be platforms for keeping up with each other has become a mess of enviable posts. They encourage comparisons and the desire for more. Truthfully, very few people are that happy. Very few people are doing better than you are.

The question remains, though. What kind of God gives the same reward to one-hour workers and twelve-hour workers? Why don't we get what we deserve?

The world in which we live is a world of contracts and

transactions and business arrangements. We use money to buy food. We sign a contract for our new roof. Business deals are made daily and put down on paper. This is the world in which we live, and we need these guidelines and boundaries. With them, we can seek justice when promises are broken.

God and God's kingdom isn't like our transactional world. God doesn't negotiate contracts and deals with us. God's coin of the realm is not money, but mercy. Grace isn't a contract; it's a gift.

Thank God we don't get what we deserve. Our reward isn't based on merit or the quantity or quality of our work. It's mercy and grace that comes from our willingness to answer God's call to serve in the kingdom.

Every morning at 7:00 you'll find me walking with five of my neighbors. We laugh and complain and discuss a variety of subjects.

The other day they asked me about our food ministry. I explained about the Blessing Box: "Take What You Need, Leave What You Can," and the Blessing Garden filled with fresh vegetables. I went on to talk about our Community

Dinners: farm-to-table, healthy, and tasty. We offer radical hospitality.

"What about those who are immuno-suppressed? How are they able to serve?"

"They're the ones who bake the pies or brownies or the chicken pot pie. They donate money for us

The Presbyterian-Methodist Fellowship Church

to buy the extra supplies. A few of us drop by their homes and pick up the food. They feel involved and connected with us.”

We cook, weed and water the garden, fill the Blessing Box. We pray and give of ourselves and our material possessions. We are answering God’s call to serve those who God puts in our path.

Our reward is the denarius of gratitude from those we serve, the feel of the warm earth running through our fingers, the joy of having enough to fill the Blessing Box. What we receive we hardly count. This isn’t a contract we’re fulfilling but God whom we’re serving.

The early arrivals to the vineyard saw the work as a burden. So, when they saw what the late arrivals received, the gift was lost on them.

The vineyard owner had to go to the marketplace to find and hire them. His was the gift of work with pay. Mercy and grace abounded, and they missed it.

What if we read this scripture from the point of view of the late arrivals? What if the early arrivals saw the generosity of the vineyard and celebrated with them? That would be a glimpse of the kingdom of God where everyone has a seat at the table.

When we look at our lives through God’s eyes, we are surprised by what we see. We see how often we are ungrateful for God’s grace and mercy. We see how often we deny God’s love and forgiveness.

We also see God who loves us because we are God’s creation. See yourself as a valued creature in God’s sight and how much God yearns for you to come closer.

Not only to work in the vineyard, but for deeper relationship with the Vineyard Owner.

All glory and honor be to God.

Amen.

One All-important Word

Sometimes one word makes all the difference. In John 14:16, when Jesus promises the disciples that God will send the Holy Spirit, he doesn’t say “the” Helper or “a” Helper but “another” Helper. For there to be “another” of something, we must already be familiar with a first of that thing. Jesus has been, for the disciples, their first Helper. They already “know him for he dwells with [them]” (verse 17, ESV).

When my infant son was to start full-time daycare, the transition went quite smoothly. That’s because his “new” caregiver wasn’t new at all: She was Grandma! The sense that my son would be in the hands of another family member he already knew eased the handoff for Mama and baby alike.

Not all parents have access to that type of situation, but the caregiving arrangement Jesus provided his disciples is available to all. Even when Jesus is no longer physically with us, another who loves us just as much — another we already know and whose truth we’ve seen in Jesus — is here.



We're in good hands.

—Heidi Mann