

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Workers in the Vineyard

**August 7, 2011
The Lord's Supper**

**Psalm 85 and Matthew 20:1-16
(Hymns – 34, 449, 534, 557)**

This parable helps us understand just how scandalous the Gospel of Jesus Christ must have sounded to its original hearers and just how difficult it might be to hear today.

Some workers worked all day, some parts of a day,
some only an hour,
and they were all paid the same –
one silver coin –
the usual subsistence wage for that time and place.

There are interesting parallels here to the story of the Prodigal Son/Profligate Father. There is the same pattern of outlandish generosity, angry criticism and questioning of that generosity, and then an explanation of the generosity.

In this part of the Matthew's Gospel, the story of the workers is part of a number stories and exchanges about status, wealth, greed and discipleship. In all of them, worldly expectations are reversed in the light of the kingdom of heaven.

In this story, the world's expectations around fairness and justice around due consideration for loyalty and effort, around a day's wage for a day's work, are scandalously overturned.

God's generous justice seeks mercy and ways to express love.

In God's generous goodness, the riches of the kingdom will be shared with all those who answer the invitation regardless of when they came to engage in the work.

This is how the God present in Jesus Christ works –
with a gracious generosity that shocks and scandalizes.

The key challenge from Jesus in the parable is this:
are you jealous that I am generous and good?

I suspect that we all have to admit
to some degree of that kind of jealousy.
It's the feeling of someone else getting more than we do,
more than they deserve, more than is fair and just.

Maybe it's a driver who speeds by the access lane
and merges in ahead of you causing you to slam on your breaks.

Maybe it's the man who butts into the line at Safeway
and then takes 10 minutes complaining about something.

Maybe it's the guy who got the promotion
when you were convinced that you were more qualified.

Maybe it's someone who you feel is more favoured
by a person whose affection is important to you.

These kinds of little jealousies build up within our systems
and poison our relationships.

God's promise is that we can be free of these kinds of jealousies.

As we grow into the maturity of the kingdom,
as our awareness is shaped by the mind of Christ,
we come to see ourselves as beloved children
of our heavenly Father,
part of the community of the kingdom,
a member of the body of Christ.

In that community,
from the perspective of the kingdom,
having in us the mind of Christ
and being part of the body of Christ,
we are encouraged by the Spirit to see things differently.

We are invited to recognize that the way to flourish
is to follow Jesus into his ways of generous goodness and grace,
giving what is needed and rejoicing in the well-being of others.

Too often we find ourselves caught in the thought patterns
of those who worked all day and the elder son.

It's not fair to me. Give me my due. I deserve better.
Look how loyal I have been to you.
Don't I deserve better than them.

Jesus' answer is clear – No!
That's not the way my Father, my Spirit, and I work.
We dance with joy whenever anyone accepts
our invitation to flourish in the fullness of the gifts we offer.
You will experience the true depths of joy
when you do the same.
Focus your attention on learning about and practising
the generous goodness of God
that you see, and feel, and understand, and experience in me.
Be that generous goodness for others.
Thus, you will experience more deeply within yourself.

It is that generous goodness of God in Christ
that we remember and celebrate
around the Lord's table this morning at the Lord's Supper.
We are fed and nourished
in the depths of our souls
with the generous goodness of God.
We are fed and nourished
In the depths of our souls
so that we can share that generous goodness
with all we meet in this coming month.
We are fed and nourished
In the depths of our souls
so we can flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Come, Jesus Christ invites us to gather at his feast as his friends
to be fed with his generous goodness.

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