



Capital News
Capital Campaign Committee
November 5, 2023

Caring for God's House - Together



**Message from the
Pastor**

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

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 a denarius for the day, 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 a denarius.¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.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 a denarius?’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.”

Pastor Kathy’s Sermon:

This isn’t the only time Jesus says this or something like it. This parable offends our sensibilities - this isn’t how the world is supposed to work!

Jesus really is a master storyteller. He describes the situation of a vineyard owner going to get day laborers for his grape harvest. He finds the laborers and offers them the typical wage for a day’s work and sends them off to work. Then throughout the day every few hours the owner goes back out and gathers more workers. Perhaps he has heard that rain is coming and he needs to get the crops in. Finally it was almost the end of the day and there are still a few laborers in the town square. He asks them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” Their response, “Because no one has hired us.”

The parable doesn’t say anything of “why”— it only says that no one had hired them. We have no idea why they weren’t hired and *Jesus doesn’t think it is an important detail to add* — because, when hired they went to work.

The end of the work day has come and this is when Jesus really gets clever — he has the landowner pay those who only worked about an hour paid first — imagine being one of them and getting paid as though they had worked the full day! They had to be literally dancing all the way home!

Now those who had worked longer had to be thinking they would be paid more if he paid those latecomers what we were to be paid. And the first hearers of this story — the church leaders — were right there with them, waiting on the edge of their seats how much extra would they be

paid? What might I do if I was paid extra? Jesus has them eating out of the palm of his hand.

And then wham! Down it comes! These workers who had put in a full day were paid the same as those who only worked part of the day. That isn't fair! That isn't justice! "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us..."

Pay was NOT the real issue here. You have made them equal to us. They saw themselves as superior to at least those who came toward the end of the day. But the owner has made them equals.

If the landowner had paid them in reverse order then these workers would never have known what the others were paid. Perhaps there wouldn't have been any grumbling — they could have gone on thinking themselves to be the superior ones. *But Jesus doesn't tell the story that way because then there wouldn't be any offense for the listener and thus no teachable moment, no reason to tell the story at all.*

One of the questions this parable addresses is: **Why do we have a need to be better than others?** I'm not talking about athletic competition or making a better product. I mean why do we have the need to think we are superior to others? Look at how we have viewed these late coming workers — we have no idea why they had not yet been hired, but we make assumptions. And from the looks of this scripture we are not the first to be this way.

There is a scene in Charlie Brown Christmas where Charlie's sister Sally asks him to write a letter to Santa for her. She is about to start her list, noting that she is listing size and quantities of each item. She concludes by saying "if this is too complicated you can just send cash — tens and twenties would be good." When Charlie Brown laments her greed she replies with, "All I want is what I have coming to me. All I want is **my fair share.**"

Isn't that what most of us want? What is fair, what we think we deserve? If someone gets more affirmation or attention than we do, or if someone gets something we do not think they deserve, we can be resentful. Which leads to the questions asked by the landowner — "Can I not do what I want with what is mine? do you resent my generosity?"

Perhaps that is at the root of this parable — we are resentful of the landowner's generosity. For generosity for no reason makes us suspicious. ("Why are you giving this to me? Why are you being so generous with them?") And yet generosity by its definition does not have strings attached — generosity with strings isn't generosity — *it's a deal.*

Generosity such as Jesus ascribes to God is not measurable; nor can you account for it, nor can you calculate it out like a tip on a dinner check. Generosity, especially God's generosity isn't concerned about what the world thinks is fair. It doesn't measure one person's gift against another's. *God is generous as God chooses to be.*

The Kingdom of God is about valuing people equally regardless of how the world values them. Part of building the kingdom on earth *as it is in heaven* is learning this kind of generosity- *where we value each person for who they are — a child of God* — not for what they do or contribute or offer. Not for how long they have been around or how beloved they are. The church is to be a reflection of God's reign on earth which means we value each person and lavish the same grace and acceptance upon each one. Once we have practiced this within the Body of Christ, then we can practice it at the post office and the grocery store, in the office and classroom, with our neighbors and those pesky relatives. *We can begin to bring God's generous kingdom of grace to our world.*

Is this parable unfair? Absolutely! Does it show us God's sense of what is just? You bet it does! Does that offend the way the world works? Without a doubt. Which is why it just sticks in our craw, every time we hear it. But it also speaks a truth we know we need to hear — that as long as we cling to the world of fair shares and getting what we deserve, we will not understand God's Kingdom of Heaven. It's just that simple...and just that hard.

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain." Psalm 127:1
Thank you for your support!

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