

Uncomfortable Generosity

16 Pentecost A – Sept 20, 2020

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Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

[Jesus said:] 1“The dominion of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4and 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. 6And 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?’ 7They 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.’ 9When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12saying, ‘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.’ 13But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Jesus tells a parable about God’s generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.

This is part of Matthew's fourth great discourse of Jesus (18:1-35), which is devoted to teachings about relations among members in that community, relations between those inside & those outside that community, & the nature of life within that community.

According to standard outlines of Matthew, the allegory of the laborers in the vineyard is in the fourth section (16:13—20:34), which focuses on preparation for the death and raising of Jesus, God’s Son. For Matthew, “heaven” is a circumlocution for God, and “the kingdom” refers to the eschatological end of all things, the way it will be in God. Today’s allegory, with the generous landowner being God and the laborers embodying

*the varying commitments of believers, makes the biblical point that in God all earthly values are reversed. Divine mercy is not fair. It is likely that by the time of the writing of Matthew's gospel, contemporary church leaders were being negatively compared with ones closer to the time of Jesus, and the evangelist wishes to negate such criticism. Once again, Matthew balances his earlier emphasis on righteous living with the assurance of God's forgiveness. **The allegory contradicts the commonplace religious idea that in the afterlife, heaven or hell will be assigned as deserved.** In this allegory, God disrupts our notions of reward and punishment by surprising mercy. We receive this mercy already at the table. (sundaysandseasons.com)*

- I. Trophies & Awards; Paychecks & Welfare
- II. Those wandering/wondering feelings: "Does anyone really want me or value me?"
- III. Grace as Undeserved Generosity & Love
- IV. The Church is not a Meritocracy; it is a community of Uncomfortable Grace