

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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Matt 20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the labourers 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 labourers 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."

**TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME**

20th September 2026

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

It is probable that the parable is dealing again with a situation in Matthew's community. The question behind the parable seems to be this: newcomers to the covenant, that is, the Gentiles, should be received on exactly the same basis as those who have been faithful to the covenant for centuries, that is, the people of Israel. The time aspect of the parable is the key: no matter how long or how short your living of the covenant has been, the very same welcome and grace are given to all. As St Paul puts it, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

KIND OF WRITING

This is a parable, which takes an ordinary situation, that of day labourers, and goes against natural justice to make the point that while humans must regulate wages for justice, there is no limit to God's overflowing grace and generosity.

Thought for the day

The forty-two parables in the Gospels are designed to take us up short and make us think again. Today's parable is a good example. The actions of the employer and the treatment of the workers simply would not work today as a labour relations strategy and would also not have worked in the time of Jesus. And what is the point? Really that it doesn't matter when we come to the Gospel, early, middle or late, by routes direct or circuitous, in full stride or falteringly: all that matters is that we come to the Gospel. Achievement counts for nothing; grace is everything, thanks be to God!

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. "I was there first". Envy easily comes to the surface when faced with the good fortune of others, especially when compared to what seems less favourable treatment of ourselves. Can you recall that feeling in yourself and what it did to you? Can you also recall times when you were content with your lot, even though it seemed others had greater gifts, better opportunities, etc.
2. A parent or teacher who gives a lot of time to a difficult child does not love the others less, but if we are one of those other children we may not see that. Recall a "Jesus person" in your life who helped you to overcome feelings of envy and helped you appreciate that the apparently more favourable treatment of another did not mean a lessening of love for you.
3. This leads us to the core message of this parable, namely, that God's love is a free gift, and not earned. Recall moments when you were particularly conscious of the gifts that God has given you by counting all the blessings that you have, no matter how small.
4. "It is too late now" are words sometimes uttered to justify doing nothing about a situation. This parable tells us that where love is involved, it is never too late. Can you recall times when you got a positive response after taking action when you thought it was "too late"?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

GOD IS GOOD TO ALL

This is certainly one of Jesus' most surprising and provocative parables. We used to call it the "parable of the employer in the vineyard. Some scholars today call it "the parable of the boss who wanted work and bread for everyone."

This man goes personally into the town square to hire different groups of workers. The first go out at six in the morning, others at nine, others at noon and three in the afternoon. He hires the rest at five o'clock, when there is only an hour left in the work day.

This is strange behaviour. He apparently isn't just in a hurry to finish the grape harvest. What he wants is for none to go without work. He even goes out at the last hour, to hire those who were not called. At the end of the day he gives everyone what they need in order to eat that night, even if they haven't earned it. When the first group protests, he replies: "Are you envious because I am good?"

What is Jesus saying? That God's criteria for justice and equality are different from ours? Can it be that instead of counting people's merits, God is responding to their needs?

It is not easy to believe in the unfathomable goodness of God that Jesus is describing. Many people are scandalised to think that God is good to everyone, regardless of whether they deserve it, whether they are believers or agnostics, whether they call on his name or turn their backs on him. But that is how God is. It would be better to let God be God, rather than shrink God to fit our ideas and expectations.

The image of God that many Christians hold is a mixture of sometimes contradictory elements. Some aspects come from Jesus, others from the judgmental God of the Old Testament, others from our own fears and fantasies. Thus God's goodness to all his creatures gets lost or distorted.

One of the more important tasks of the Christian community is always to look more deeply into Jesus' lived experience of God. Only by witnessing to that God can we fill the world with a different kind of hope.

The parable of the vineyard revolutionises our way of conceiving of God. According to Jesus, God's goodness is unfathomable and does not fit into any calculations we can do.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - The Way Opened up by Jesus

The climax of the story is in verses 8 to 15. The lessons Jesus wanted to teach are to be discovered here. Our meditation must be a slow journey through these verses, taking our time over each one.

We start with verses 8 to 12; they invite us to recall moments when we feel aggrieved at our lot in life: we have been hard done by, did not get what we deserved. On these occasions we always find ourselves making comparisons between ourselves and others, that vague but all-encompassing "they". "They" did not have to work as hard as we did; "their" families had fewer problems; "their" age is more exciting; life was easier to cope with in "their" time.

We then move to the landowner's response, which is in several steps.

Then the landowner then explains his position, logically and rationally. We think of ourselves having to deal with a friend's jealousy, a mother reassuring the child who feels left out, a manager reassuring workers who think that their work is not appreciated.

The landowner puts forward **three arguments. The first is simply to reassure the worker that he has been justly treated,** "I am not being unjust to you, did we not agree on one denarius?" We must be careful to interpret this in the context of the parable, which is that of deep human relationships, even of our relationship with God. It is not therefore an employer negotiating with a trade union delegation, but a mother saying to her child, "I have given you all my love"; it is a moment of prayer when God gives us the grace to be freed of jealousy and resentment and to relax in the "blessed assurance" that he loves us unconditionally.

The landowner's **second argument** is also very touching: "**Have I no right to do what I like with my own?**" We grasp here that envy is closely linked to possessiveness. We want to possess people (or things) because we are afraid that if we have to share them with others there will not be enough for us. Who are the people who taught us that this is not true, that someone can love us deeply and yet can be close to others in ways they are not close with us? This can happen even between spouses, as we know, and of course between us and God.

The **third argument** is in the form of a question. "**Why be envious because I am generous?**" It is a further teaching on envy, through experience as always, the experience of a confrontation between an envious person and a generous one. Envious people calculate, look at what others have and they don't, what they could have got and didn't. Generous people are spontaneous, respond to situations as they present themselves, don't worry about pleasing everyone – but careful to be just. We have been and have met both kinds of people.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

Parables usually have some sort of a sting in the tail which demands reflection, because on the surface the story makes no sense. That is very clear in this story.

If we bear in mind that the community (when Matthew was writing) mostly consisting of Jewish Christians is now welcoming Gentiles into their number it gives us a context for understanding. It would be normal for the Jews to consider their Gentile neighbours as morally inferior since they practised paganism and ignored the demands of the Law of Moses. Now they come to Christ and are to be treated as equals. Surely this is too much to ask. Jesus' point is this and it applies to Christians now as well as then: the generous love of 'god is freely given and not earned.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand