

## **Employment Practices in God's Vineyard**

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have to admit, I chuckled a bit when I read the gospel text for today. A few weeks ago at a youth planning meeting we were talking about how funds from fundraisers for next year's gathering would be divided between participants.– Would the funds be split evenly or would we determine an hourly wage for those who came and helped with the work. And I said, for my sanity it would be easier to split the money evenly between the people who came to work instead of determining an hourly wage. I then followed up with the comment that there is a very good parable and a learning moment in this decision if anyone had any concerns. And with that, we all seemed to agree. And I have to admit that I kept saying to myself after that meeting, Pastor Wendy, you really need to refresh your memory on the ins

and the ends of the parable of the vineyard and long and behold without looking ahead on the preaching schedule, God already had a plan.

Today's parable is one that is hard for us to comprehend. Jesus says the exact opposite of what we expect. The landowner goes to find laborers for the day's work in his vineyard. He finds a few people and agrees to pay them the usual daily wage. He then goes out four more times throughout the day and hires more people to work for him agreeing to pay them what was right for their work.

The landowner went out into the marketplace and saw people looking for work and had compassion on them. We don't know why these individuals didn't have work – maybe it was they didn't possess the necessary skills for certain jobs or maybe it was a lack of opportunity. Whatever the case, the landowner invited them to take part in the work in his vineyard.

At the end of the day, all of the workers gathered and they got paid the same regardless of how long they worked. And as we just heard, those that worked all day were not happy with the landowner's decision.

Think for a moment. If you were the one who worked hard all day and received the same pay as those that only worked an hour, would you be upset? I know I would. I would be frustrated that I wasn't rewarded more for my efforts. I would probably also think twice about saying yes to work for this particular person again – especially early in the morning.

I think it's easy for all of us to identify with the workers that began early in the morning. We all want to be rewarded for the things that we do.

The landowner turned things up-side-down in his reply to the workers who were upset. He said, "I did you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this

last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what first belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

I can't imagine what the workers that began in the early morning were thinking. I imagine some of them were probably very angry, and others may have felt ashamed for the way that they acted.

What does this parable mean for us today? There are a variety of ways that scholars discuss this parable. Some stress God's generosity and others stress God's equality. Both of these are important themes to think about when talking about this parable. I think the larger picture is that God wants everyone to work in his vineyard. He will continue to go out into the marketplace and seek those who are standing idle.

Craig Kocher writes in his living by the word article in the Christian Century:

“Yet this parable suggests that in the economy of God’s kingdom there is something better than profit margin, greater than incentive and reward, more beautiful than a sharply run business – and that is abundant grace. The story is about a God who wants everyone inside the vineyard, who will not rest until the outsiders, the forgotten and the lonely have been included alongside the skilled, the timely and the hard working, even if it costs God everything.”

God’s kingdom is for everyone. This parable demonstrates that to us. It doesn’t matter to God if you have worked in his kingdom your whole life or for five minutes. The point is that we do God’s work. God loves the infant as much as he loves the person who is one hundred and three.

Martin Luther has a wonderful explanation about a Christian life. Luther writes in the large catechism that, “Thus a Christian life is nothing else than

a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after.” He reminds us that it is a daily action. It’s an action that doesn’t rack up points with God. We are all equal in God’s eyes as we work in God’s vineyard.

We work for the kingdom of God ~ everyone’s reward is the same, which is the gift of God’s abundant grace.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.