

Matthew 20:1-16a

Jesus tells the parable of a landowner who hired people to work in his vineyard. The landowner started hiring workers at dawn and continued going out every few hours looking for other workers. He agreed to pay each one the “usual daily wage.”

When evening came, the landowner had his foreman called the workers to pay them, “beginning with the last and ending with the first.” They all got the same “usual daily wage.”

Now when those who were hired in the early hours of the morning came, they thought that they would receive more. They “grumbled against the landowner.” He said, “I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?” “What if I give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?”

Jesus says this is a story about the kingdom of heaven... about God’s reign. I see here that God is immensely generous. Anyone can accept God’s invitation. Everyone will be treated the same. But that irritates some – who think that they have earned more, are “deserving” of more. Ah, that’s the rub!

We think that we are “deserving.” We “earn” things from God. Jesus’ story tells us that God gives generously to all. Early-comers or late arrivals are treated the same.

That doesn’t fit our capitalist, meritocracy mindset. We only value what we “earn” and “deserve.” Not only that, we value working to “get someplace:” to have more than others.

Jesus turns our ideas upside down. Nothing is earned from God. God’s grace comes first, it is a gift, it is free – to everyone, whether they come first or last! Can we live with that?

Can we live *like* that? We are all in this together. All called into the vineyard of God. We receive freely from God. Can we give as freely to each other, or do we judge if someone is “deserving” or not? Let’s face it, we are all “latecomers” to the work of the vineyard. But we freely receive life and grace in abundance.

This election season, will we study the candidates and issues to see what choices advance the reign of God? Will we choose candidates and issues that benefit the well-being of every single person given God’s gift of life?