



Jealous of a Generous God
Matthew 20:1-16
Sunday, September 20th, 2020
The First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

Text:

*Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?
Or are you jealous because I am generous?*
(v. 15)

Writer and minister Frederick Buechner once wrote that a parable is a small story with a large point. They challenge our preconceived notions and confront our world views.

I believe that today's lesson is a kind of spiritual Rorschach test; who, in the parable, do you most identify? The Landowner? I hope not because that raises all kinds of issues that I'm not prepared to deal with right now! The Worker who labored all day? The one who worked only half of the day? How about the one who worked three hours? Or maybe the one who only worked an hour?

Let's take a step back and get some background. A denarii equaled a day's wage. At a time when a worker was paid at the end of the day in order to provide for his family, a denarii was slightly more than what we would call a minimum wage.

Day Laborers would gather at a designated place and hire themselves out for the day. The unlucky ones would be those who were hired later and later in the day.

The parable is set at harvest time. The harvest needed to be picked immediately, and it became evident that the harvest was greater than expected. The landowner went to the market place time and time again.

At the end of the day, in keeping with the law and custom of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 24:15, each worker was paid. But the landowner decided to pay the last ones hired first. Imagine their surprise when they received a full day's wage! And imagine the surprise when each of the workers were paid exactly the same, not the hourly rate, but enough to feed and care for their families! The ones who worked all day were surprised, just not pleasantly surprised. They were tiffed. They cried, "It's not fair!"

Not fair. Were they not paid the agreed upon wage? Well, yes, but...

No buts, did they resent, were they jealous of the landowner's generosity? Since you put it that way, YES. Aren't we? Deep down, aren't we? There is something within our hearts that sympathizes with the ones who worked all day. That's really the ones that we identify with, isn't it?

It's just not fair. Fair? Do we really want fair? Really? Recall that earlier in Matthew's gospel in what is called the Sermon on the Mount, that after the Beatitudes Jesus went on to teach that a thought is as bad as an action. Wishing someone dead or ill is just like murder for we have done it in our hearts. Lusting after another person is just like committing adultery in the eyes of God. Do we really want fair? Do we want God to judge us by our thoughts as well as our actions? .

This past week we finished a bible study on the gospel of Luke. In the closing chapter we have the story of two criminals crucified along with Jesus, one on his left and the other on his right. One of the criminals railed against Jesus. The other reprimanded the first. "We are here justly," he said, "but this man Jesus has done nothing deserving this punishment." Then turning to Jesus he said, "Remember me when you enter your kingdom." And Jesus replied, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

A "deathbed" confession. Is it fair? No, but in God's Kingdom the angels sing over a lost lamb that is found, a lost coin discovered, and an estranged child who is reconciled. In eternity there is no time for the last hour is no different than the first.

This parable is not about fairness but generosity. We worship not a fair God but a generous God. Today's text is only good news if we can get off of our high horse and identify with the workers who were hired at the last hour. When we see ourselves in their shoes we are humbled by unbelievable generosity.

You see, we worship an unbelievably generous God who calls us to live lives of generosity.

To God be the glory.

Amen.