

Y Bother?
Matthew 20:1-16
Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church
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The facts of the story are simple. A landowner needed some workers for the day, to work in his vineyard. So he went out “early in the morning” and after agreeing on “the usual daily wage,” put them to work. At about 9 a.m. he saw some idle people uptown and asked them if they wanted a job. They did and so he put them to work. The same thing happens at noon, 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. An hour later, he summons the 5 p.m. crew and sends them away with a full day’s pay, doing the same with the 3 p.m., noon and 9 a.m. crews.

Only when the first crew arrives, they believe that if the 5 p.m. gang got a full day’s pay for one hour’s work, they — having been in the vineyard for almost 12 hours — will surely get a hefty paycheck.

Wrong. The landowner gives them the “usual daily wage” upon which they’d agreed. This upsets the hard-working crew of the first shift, and they complain about it. The owner, however, says he can do as he wants with his money and that they got what they had agreed upon.

He suggests that they’re just “upset because of his generosity”

and the moral of the story: “The last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Hmm.... We have a lot trouble with this don't we? In our first come, first serve society, in our you get what you deserve society, in our hard work will be rewarded with just dues society--this story gets under our skin doesn't it? How ridiculous to give those who have worked only an hour a whole day's wage. What do you mean you just felt like being generous? Where's the justice in all of this? Where's the reward for the hard work?

Jesus just looks at us and says: "In God's kingdom, the first will be last and the last will be first." No wonder Jesus got into so much trouble.

Some of us know what it is like to be in the back of the line. And in our first come, first serve world, there are many people, including some of us, who are permanently in the back of the line. Often times the people in the back of the line don't get enough to eat, can't feed their children, don't have health insurance, or access to good quality health care. People in the back of the line get foreclosed on, if they have shelter at all. Some of us know what that is like. Some of us live in the back of the line.

Others of us spend most of our time in the front of the line. And we know that our world rewards those who are in front. And we who find ourselves in the front of the line were lucky enough to find our way to the front, or be born there, or someone saved us a place in line. Some of us in the front of the line also worked hard to get there, saving and scrimping and doing all we could to get to this place of reward.

This is the way our world is: With people in the front of the line and people in the back of the line.

But then Jesus tells this story. And this story really is not a story at all, but rather a glimpse into God's kingdom. And in the glimpse we see God turning the world we know and live in completely upside down.

Because God doesn't want a world in which people are permanently in the back of the line. In fact, God doesn't believe in lines at all.

Instead God offers grace. Amazing, unconditional, grace.

And it is so hard for us to understand.

Grace isn't about first come, first serve. Grace isn't concerned with rewards for good works. And Thanks be to God, Grace isn't given only

to those who deserve it. Thanks be to God for that we don't get what we deserve. Instead: we get God's unconditional love... whether we deserve it or not. Why? Because that is the way God wants it to be.

God's Grace is offered, to all regardless of when we got in line. This is the shocking point that Jesus is making with this story. For the truth is that God gives us all the same amount of love. Not because we earn it, but simply because God loves us all.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

Of course, in our first come, first serve culture, the story raises the inevitable question, Y Bother? Why go to work at 6 a.m. when I can show up 11 hours later, do one hour of work, and get paid the same wage?

The short answer is that this really isn't the point at all. The point is that what God is really about is finding ways to welcome people to faith. That is why God is always looking for workers, right up to the end of the day.

The longer answer is that: It is a blessing to have a job. Ask anyone who is looking for work right now, how they understand this parable. And the truth here is that God doesn't do fairness as we understand fairness. And that's a mighty good thing. Would we really want God to deal with us according to our works? To compensate us in terms of how we're living our lives? Probably not.

In God's realm, there is simply God's love for everyone. Whether you're at the front or the back of the line. It's not about fairness as we understand it. It's not about works and rewards. It's about Grace. God's amazing, unconditional grace.

When we been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise then when we've first begun.

The Last will be first, and the first will be last. And everyone rejoices and everyone is welcomed. With a party like that, we realize it really is worth the bother. Amen.