

Jesus is Generous

Matthew 20:1-16

Introduction

Imagine a time in your life when you were looking for a job.

- If that time is right now, you would be focused on such tasks as writing a resume, researching potential employers, networking with people you know, contacting temp agencies, or logging on to such sites as Indeed or ZipRecruiter.
- It would likely involve multiple interviews and background checks, letters of reference and some kind of job re-training program that needed to be completed.
- You wouldn't be simply standing around and waiting. At least, you shouldn't be.
- In Biblical times the job-hunting process was much different than it is today. In some ways, it was much less complicated. But at the same time, it was also much more difficult.

Our text today tells a parable – a story – about people looking for work.

- As was the common practice, people who wanted to work went to the marketplace every day to see who was hiring.
- In Biblical times, most workers were day laborers, and going to the marketplace was how they found work, especially during the harvest season.

Once the fruit was ready to be harvested, the vineyard owner would make his way to the marketplace very early in the morning, looking for workers for his fields that day.

- The early bird gets the worm, so the potential workers who were there at that early hour were the first to get hired.
- The owner would make one or perhaps two trips per day early in the harvest, but as the season drew on, and the likelihood increased that part of the harvest would be lost, the owner would make increasingly more return trips in search of laborers.

The situation of the vineyard owner in today's parable must have been dire, for he made multiple return trips to the market. Each time he hired more laborers. Evidently the fruit was rotting in the field, and it was imperative that he get more workers to save as much fruit as possible.

The owner contracted with the first workers at 6:00 a.m. offering them a fair day's wage. The workers were happy. The owner was happy.

- Then, the owner returned at nine o'clock, at noon, and at three o'clock, and at five o'clock. To these workers the landowner simply said, "I'll pay you whatever is right." No set hourly rate was mentioned. The workers went to work. They were happy, and the landowner was happy.

When the end of the workday arrived, something very unexpected happened.

- Every worker, regardless of how long they worked, received the same daily wage.

- Those who worked a 12-hour day were paid exactly the same amount of money as those who worked just one hour.

So how would that make you feel? Surprised? Grateful? Or maybe... a little upset? The ending of the story introduces our Jesus statement for this week.

As you hopefully know, we are spending this month of September – our Stewardship emphasis month – asking ourselves what Jesus would do if He were in our shoes and circumstances, and He was limited to our own stewardship components of TIME, TALENT, TESTIMONY and TREASURE. In other words:

What would Jesus do if He had our Time, Talent, Testimony and Treasure?

So far this month, we have thought about how Jesus calls us to love our neighbor and to develop a habit of never-ending forgiveness. Today we discover that, given our time, talent, testimony and treasure, Jesus would be generous:

Jesus is generous.

In fact, one writer describes Jesus as “radically generous.” I make three observations:

#1: JESUS OPERATES WITH GENEROSITY, NOT FAIRNESS

“Fair” never enters into the vocabulary of Jesus. Other people raise it to Him, but Jesus never does.

For example, just prior to telling this parable, Jesus had a conversation with the “rich young ruler.” Remember that story?

- This young man thought he was pretty hot stuff because he perfectly kept all of the Ten Commandments. He thought that should earn him extra credit in heaven. After all, if you are perfect, that would only be fair to get special treatment.
- He went away after Jesus pointed out a flaw in his character.

The other disciples were shocked. They knew they were not nearly as perfect. Peter phrased the question for the other 11 disciples:

Then Peter chimed in, “We left everything and followed you. What do we get out of it?” (Matthew 19:27)

In our world, we’re used to earning what we get. Work more hours, get more pay. Put in more effort, receive more reward. The disciples left everything and spent 24 hours 7 days a week with them. Surely they would get some special! That would only be fair.

But in this parable, Jesus flips the script. The landowner — representing God — gives the same wage to everyone, whether they worked twelve hours or one. Why? Because in God’s economy ...

Blessing is not a paycheck; it's a generous gift.

Ephesians 2:8–9 reminds us:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith... it is the gift of God — not by works. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

None of us deserve it. None of us can earn it. We receive it because Jesus is generous.

#2: JESUS ESPECIALLY NOTICES THE FORGOTTEN

Notice that the landowner keeps going back to the marketplace — early morning, mid-morning, noon, afternoon, and even at the last hour. This tells us something powerful:

Jesus seeks out those who are overlooked.

The workers hired at 5 p.m. had been passed over all day. No one had hired them. Maybe they had not even been there earlier in the day. Perhaps they slept in. We aren't told why they were still unemployed at the end of the day, but they were.

- Whatever the reason they were still hanging around the marketplace near quitting time, the landowner still wanted them for his vineyard.

I had the good fortune to be raised by Christian parents who made sure I was in church every Sunday.

- Some of you who grew up in the United Methodist Church will remember the perfect attendance pins we used to get each year if we were in church every Sunday. I specifically remember my Uncle Ed getting his 80th pin.
- The greatest benefit was not the pin, of course. Because of that I came to faith in Jesus Christ at a very early age. That was 62 years ago. You might call me one of those people who got hired early in the morning by the owner of the vineyard.
 - I was elected to my first church council when I was 13 years old so the church could have a youth representative.

Not everyone in this world has that advantage. Especially in this current generation where church attendance is sporadic. Some people don't come to faith until they are much older.

- The oldest person I ever led to faith was a 92 year old woman named Mary Palmer. She was a widow and an alcoholic. But God turned her life around. She didn't serve God very long before her time on earth was over.

Friend, maybe you feel like you've been "left standing" in life — overlooked, undervalued, or late to the game. The generosity of Jesus says:

It's not too late. I still have a place for you.

#3: THE GENEROSITY OF JESUS CHALLENGES OUR HEARTS

You know, if I wanted to act like the first workers in this parable, I might start to grumble when I think that Mary Palmer and I will receive the same reward in heaven.

- She worked about three years. I have 62 and still counting.

We might think:

- "I've been faithful for years — why should they get the same blessing?"
- "I've sacrificed so much — shouldn't I be rewarded more?"
- "I've been a part of this church a whole lot longer than they have!"

But Jesus reminds us:

The last will be first, and the first will be last. (Matthew 20:16)

In other words, the generosity of Jesus is not a competition — it's a celebration. When someone else is on the receiving end, it doesn't diminish what we receive.

APPLICATION

So how do we apply this?

You and I are the recipients of the generosity of Jesus.

- We are privileged to walk with Him every day.
- We have been blessed by Him beyond all measure.
- We know that everything we have comes from Him. Our time, our talent, our testimony, our treasure. It is all His.

Since that is true ... we are called by God to share that generosity with others. It's what Jesus would do. That's why the Scripture tells us:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:48)

So let's extend it:

1. Celebrate the blessings others receive — even when you don't think they deserve it.
2. Keep inviting the overlooked — just as the landowner kept going back for more workers.
3. Give without calculating — because God didn't calculate when He gave to us.

The generosity of Jesus is not just about wages in a vineyard — it's about life eternal and life now in the Kingdom of God.

So today, let's not compare. Let's join the celebration of generosity. Let's rejoice that our God is not fair by human standards — He is far better. He is generous beyond measure.

Amen.