



Daily Reflections

September 24, 2017

Scripture

Matthew 20: 1-16

Jesus told his disciples this parable:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

Going out about nine o'clock, the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.'

So they went off.

And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise.

Going out about five o'clock, the landowner found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'

They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.'

He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.'

When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.'

When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage.

So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more,

but each of them also got the usual wage.
And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying,
'These last ones worked only one hour,
and you have made them equal to us,
who bore the day's burden and the heat.'
He said to one of them in reply,
'My friend, I am not cheating you.
Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?
Take what is yours and go.
What if I wish to 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?'
Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Our Scripture Reflection

Can you imagine the size of the lawsuit that would be filed against Jesus if He had uttered today's Gospel at our city square?? "UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICES!" many would have shouted. But Jesus is not advocating unfairness, but rather, mercifulness. Through the use of this stinging parable, Jesus is illustrating one important point about His Heavenly Father: God gives to us based on need not on what we deserve. For those of us who are sinners, that's amazingly joyful news!

Food for your Journey

A woman was in my office this week. Together we reflected on what has been happening in the past two years since the day when, in her words, she dragged herself into this church She had rebelled against organized religion, and she said she knew she didn't fit in ... perhaps, she said, because of the sweat suit and tennis shoes she wore every Sunday. She was suffering from a debilitating neuromuscular disease.

She kept coming back. Then one day she came in to see me. She said in her letter that she was ready for war. I didn't realize that; I thought we were just getting acquainted. She had read my book, *Jesus Makes the Difference*, and she didn't like some of what she read. She opened the conversation by saying that she didn't see why anybody would have to die to save her.

I don't know what she expected. Some preachers would probably have kicked her out of the office or tried to set her straight on the theology of the Atonement. She was surprised when I said, "You're in good company. There have been good Christian folks for 2,000 years who have had a hard time understanding what it means to say that Jesus died for us. Let's work on that."

We worked on it that day, and at the end of the conversation, I told her we could keep working on it. She got into a Disciple Bible Study. She got involved in the life of the church. She had

to remind me of her physical condition. I had almost forgotten it because within six or eight weeks, it was gone. She was healed.

No circus-tent miracles; no falling on the floor or jumping up and down. Just real, genuine, wholeness and healing in her body. She said, "I think I've figured out what happened. In this church, I received a transfusion of love." She compared it to a blood transfusion which goes into your body and affects every part of your body; she said she felt that the love which surrounded her here affected her whole being.

I remembered how she had looked back then. As I looked into her face last week, I was overwhelmed with the beauty in her face, the joy which beamed from her eyes.

I asked if I could share this with you, and she said, "Yes. In fact, I've been reading Isaiah, and I know what's happened. This church got me onto the highway of God."

--James Harnish,

"Joy for the Journey," Tampa, Fla.,

17 December 1995,

A Prayer from the Heart

Precious Lord, Your mercy is without limit. You continue to love me even after I turn away from You through my sins. Forgive and heal me, Lord. Help me to walk in the footsteps of Your Son. Amen.