

CHRIST THE LORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH PINOLE, CA

The Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost: September 20, 2020

“Modern Times Parable”

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Good Morning beautiful people. Today our country is in mourning over the death of Justice Ginsburg. But somehow with all the losses and anger and destruction of these times, there are many that are looking at how we got into this position of accepting injustice as the price of doing business. Let's look at what our faith has to say. Let's look at Jesus' point of view, which although focused on a business model as an explanation to the disciples, the story is about much more. It is about life as a whole and how God works in the world, which I must admit, is definitely not how we as humans see and judge things.

I have to admit when I read this Gospel passage in my early twenties after just obtaining a life-sustaining job and becoming acquainted with bills and obligations, I got angry at this Gospel story. I got just as resentful as the early workers in this Gospel do. And then, I heard a preacher tell this story. Although I don't remember who it was (it was a long time ago) and these are definitely not the exact words, the images are very powerful.

So, I give you the Gospel of Matthew.

John owns a vineyard in Solano county and needs some help; he is a landowner. He goes down to the strip by the Home Depot and gets some help from the men and women standing out by the parking lot who are willing to work for cash. Most

of them are immigrants, but a few look like “regular” Americans, so he goes and picks a few. The easiest to choose were those who spoke English.

So the workers are brought back to the vineyard and start working. John goes back to Starbucks and feels sorry because he sees a couple of veterans and a single mother with their signs up looking for money. He brings them back to the vineyard and adds them to the workers.

John then goes to the grocery store, picks up dinner, and goes to the bank, each time bringing back more workers. The day ended and they were paid and brought back to the Home Depot site. There is a dispute over the wages, and those who spoke English or felt more entitled get upset and people go home in a huff, but the landowner feels no shame. The landowner has a right to do what he wants with his own finances.

So, a modern version of the story, right? But let us consider one of the untold versions. Maybe the version that the landowner knows well. Maybe the view that God has - with a story containing a clearer vision than we have here. Maybe God will use the landowner to do his bidding and bring justice to a warped and broken world. Maybe **this** is the story God was concerned about rather than the workers who arrived earlier in the day.

Jose didn't sleep well the night before because his infant son kept coughing and his wife was not feeling well because they live in a cramped basement in a building cited to be condemned. He finally fell asleep around eight in the morning missing his friend's ride to the Home Depot.

He quickly grabbed a piece of bread, sipped some cold coffee and went out to the street to thumb a ride to the Home Depot where he might get some work. Jose gets to the Home Depot parking lot in the middle of the afternoon and knows that even if someone did pick him up for work, he would only receive an hour or so worth of income, not really enough to survive. He stands there and worries about how he will get medicine for his son. He is hungry because there had been no time to cook breakfast and his wife and child were finally asleep when he left.

I ask you, for those who worked in the field, secure that their wages would cover their expenses having had a full wage for a full day, is Jose's day worth less when all things are considered? When obviously the landowner has more than enough to go around?

Does giving security to Jose take away from those with a full day and full wage? Does God need to judge whether doing farming work for eight hours is worth the same as worrying for your next meal and family? Well, Jesus answers us with God loves us - and in this instance is providing justice and mercy for **all** in a way that often blindsides us.

We will never understand God's mercy.

We may be more aware of those disgruntled laborers, we may identify with them and their stories more than we realize. We may remember times when we felt we were dealt with unfairly. Just like the story of Jose, no one really knows what another person is dealing with. But maybe we need to mature in our spirituality. Maybe Jesus is not suggesting we focus on the workers, what if the point was the landowner all along?

It sounds like the landowner knows there may be stories that he doesn't understand or know about. It sounds like the landowner in his mercy is decreasing his own abundance to increase the security of others, without question or judgment. Maybe the landowner is working from the model of abundance rather than scarcity. And there we have it. The God of the universe, the God of all creation is an incomprehensibly generous God - unstintingly showering all of creation with undeserved abundance.

What is stopping us from experiencing God as the God of abundance? Is it our social and economic structures that focus on scarcity rather than abundance? In fact, if you look at the world globally as a bigger picture of a perfect creation, there is no scarcity.

People in different places have abundance in different areas. Countries have different resources. Some have lots of water, some have minerals, others have agriculture. Just as some people are good with their hands and creative, others focus on tech, or finances. But rather than be sealed in a bubble labeled country or area, we can obviously see that if all resources were shared, we could all have enough. What does that say about our existing structures?

Maybe the story of today's Gospel is not about disgruntled workers. Maybe it is not calling us to understand the situations of those who have less. Maybe it is not even calling us to accept God's mercy complacently.

What if today's Gospel is calling us to be the landowner? To decrease ourselves a little bit, share our abundance. And what if we did that **everyday** - without judging those who are receiving the gifts.

What if we added an extra tip to those who service us; what if we donate to the organization that sees the bigger picture of all - rather than the some. What if helping a small business owner helps the larger community? What if we are called to act in place of God at this time? What if we are truly the hands, feet and mouth of God?

I urge you to consider changing your focus from the nit-picky judgments of who deserves what, to the open arms of the landowner willing to share his abundance. Also recognize that blaming God for something humans have a big share in when it comes to the problem is not really about God at all.

The people of Nineveh in our Old Testament reading changed their ways and God showed mercy. Let us not be the angry one like Jonah because God has saved those who we might otherwise write off as not worthy. It is not for us to judge, but instead for us to celebrate the redemption of those who are lost and now are found.

I sum up this reading with the words of another Old Testament wisdom writer, Ecclesiastes. We all know the scriptures that explains everything has a season and perfect time, but here is the rest of that scripture.

“No one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.”

I repeat, that **each** of them – no distinctions – as a gift of God - should be happy and find satisfaction in all their toil, satisfaction in all they do. This is the gift of God – no exceptions. Our Gospel asks us today: Are you envious? If you are in a position, like our landowner – you have the choice to spread God’s abundance, if you are the worker, receive gracefully, then pass it on. Amen