Grumbling about Grace

Judith works with some nurses who smoke.

I hear her grumble
    Saying in some way she wished she smoked.

Not really.

But she says those who smoke
    Can take extra breaks to have a cigarette.

At ten minutes a cigarette, it adds up.

Judith says it’s not right! I agree!

~~

And what of
    “Mr. Get By With The Least Amount of Effort?”

We’ve all work alongside of him!

He leans too long on his shovel.
    He constantly goes for a drink or a restroom break.

He calls in every chance he gets.

He stops five minutes before lunch
    And linger ten minutes afterwards.

He’s always checking his smart phones.
Grumbling about Grace

And stands by the clock at exactly 5:00 to punch out.

He’s not a dairy farmer
   But he sure know how to milk the system.

And the ending scenario is always the same . . .
   We get paid the same amount.

It’s not fair!
~~
So when we read Jesus’ parable
   Concerning the laborers in the vineyard

We know exactly what it feels like
   To be the ones working the 12 hour shift!

We know exactly what it feels like
   To witness workers only working for only an hour
      Receiving the same amount of pay!

We know exactly how it feels.

And so the theological question before us today it this:

“Is it fair God grants all believers the same amount of grace
   Whether you’ve been a follower your entire life
      Or a death bed convert?”
Grumbling about Grace

Jesus continues his teachings on the kingdom of heaven.

He says such is the kingdom of heaven
And then he tells them another parable.

There was this farmer
Who went down to the local Manpower office
Early one morning before 6:00 am.

He found a few workers wanting a job.

He hires them
Promising to pay the going wage
A hundred dollars for a day’s work.

They go and begin their work on the farm.

At 9:00 am, he returns to the office
And seeing more workers looking for work
He hires them also promising a day’s wage.

At 12:00 noon, and again at 3:00 pm
He goes and hires more workers

And even once more at 5:00 pm
An hour before quitting time . . .
Grumbling about Grace

The farmer returns to the temporary job agency
   And still finding workers looking for a job
   Hires them for just one hour.

At 6:00 pm, the foreman lines up the workers
   According to when they started work
   The last ones first, the first ones last.
They step forward and receive their pay
   A hundred dollar bill for each of them.

The ones who had labored the longer hours
   Notice the workers who hadn’t worked a full day
   Receive the full day’s pay.

They naturally thought they’d receive that much more.

But when it came their turn
   The farmer paid them the exact same amount . . .
   A one-hundred-dollar bill.

And they started in . . .

“How is it these guys
   Who worked only nine hours
Grumblimg about Grace

Or these others who worked only six hours
Or these who worked just three hours
Or even the ones who worked only one hour

How is it they receive the same amount as us
Who started at 6:00 A.M.
And worked the whole twelve whole hours?”

“It’s not fair!”

And the farmer responded:

“Hey friend, I’m not being unfair to you.”
Didn’t you agree to work for a day’s wage?”

“Take your money and go!”
“I will pay what I will pay.
Don’t I have the right to so?”

~~
I have a sneaky suspicion we’d grumble too!

It’s not right.

And it’s plain as the nose on our face
Those that worked for an hour
Do not deserve the same pay
As those who worked 12.
Wages should reflect
  The individual’s total productivity. Right?

Well, just hold on!
  Let’s remember Jesus is teaching a parable,
  About the kingdom of heaven.

~~
We would do well
  To look at this parable from a different angle.

From the current perspective
  We have a right to grumble.

If we were the ones
  Who got up early to be first in line.

If we were the ones who worked our tail off
  From 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening.

If we were the ones
  Who never stop to look at our phones
  Never asked for a potty break
  Never stop to smoke a cigarette
  We’d grumble, too.

And like the laborers in the vineyard
  We’d be quick to point out
Grumbling about Grace

“Pay a fair wage for a fair day’s work
   Boss, that’s just good business sense!”

~~

But take a look at it from another perspective.

The farmer could have waited
   Telling the workers that had gathered that day
      To come back by 6 am the next day.

That way he could have gotten
   A whole day’s work out of all of them.

But he didn’t do that.

Instead, he returned throughout the day
   And found men standing around.

Okay you might say that he needed them then-and-there.

You make hay when the sun shines!
But here’s a hint . . .

When the farmer asked them,

v. 6 Why have you been standing here all day
doing nothing?

Their response?
v. 7 Because no one has hired us.

He hired them at 6, and at 9,  
And at 12, and 3, and even at 5,  
Because THEY who needed the work!

He hired them not because of his need  
But because of their need!

~~

Where did the farmer get these men?  
At Manpower.

Why were they there?  
They were unemployed.

What concerns do people have when they’re out of work?  
Money to provide for their family.

The farmer hired the men  
Because he pitied them.

And he paid them the same  
Because he was equally concerned for all!

We look at the parable and immediately put ourselves  
In the role of the 12 hour worker.

It’s not fair what the farmer is doing
Grumbling about Grace

These others don’t deserve the same amount of pay!

But what if we were one of the workers
    Who waited all day for some work to do
        And nearing 5 pm had nothing to show for it?

What if we had to go back home
    To a wife expecting something
        So she could go to the market
            And buy something to cook?

What if we had been the worker who went home
    To a family that hadn’t eaten all day?

What if . . . ?
~~

In Nigeria, at the cement depots
    Small stores that sell 100 lb. bags of cement
        To customers

When the big tractor-trailer comes to deliver
    Its load of cement

Dozens of unemployed workers show up
    Hoping for get a chance to get hired
        To unload bags of cement.
Grumbling about Grace

The owner will hire perhaps a dozen men for the job. You should see them, one after the other Each carrying a hundred pound bag on their shoulder

Hour after hour
Cement dust and sweat mingling over their bodies
Out in the blazing African sun

Happy to have a little something
To take home to their family.

But how about the extra men who weren’t hired
Turned away only to go back home
With nothing to show for it?

But just imagine the surprise, if at 5 pm
The owner, with almost an empty truck
Calls the others who hadn’t worked

Hires them to help finish unloading the truck . . .
And them gives them a full-day’s pay?

What if you were one of them?

You’d drop to your knees,
In holy wonder and gratitude?

Thank you, thank you, thank you,
Oh thank you, thank you, thank you.

You'd stoop and kiss the feet of the man who hired you.

Because the owner of the cement depot had saved the day!

The laborer can collect a full days’ wage
   And return home to an expectant family!

Rather then to return home in shame
   To a hungry and waiting family!

What a wonderful thing indeed!
~~

Such is the kingdom of heaven!

It's about those people who feel a sense of entitlement
   Like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ time.

They've worked the twelve hours and feel entitled.

And they resent the fact that Jesus welcomes the sinner
   Places favor on the marginalized
      Adds an extra helping to their plates!

It’s not right!
   It’s not fair!

They hadn’t paid their dues
Matthew 20:1-16

**Grumbling about Grace**

They hadn’t worked as hard as they had
They don’t deserve a place in the kingdom

But let me ask . . .
Who experiences God’s grace more?

The ones who feels entitled and resentful?

Or the ones who dropped to their knees
In gratitude to God’s generosity?

No, it’s not fair . . . but that’s precisely the point.

“Instead of grumbling about grace
Let’s be ambassadors of grace.

“Instead of continuing to complain
Let’s carry compassion to the hurting

“Instead of being whiners
Let’s be workers with Jesus Christ

“Let’s reach out and bring the kingdom of God
To everyone we meet.

For the “good news is . . .
There is no ranking in God’s kingdom.
Grumbling about Grace

God graces everyone the same . . .
  With mercy, restoration, and new life.
  (Lectionary Liturgies)

Through grace, let us be laborers in God’s vineyard
  Grace-filled and gracious
  Forgiven and forgiving
  Saved and saving . . .

For the glory of God and our neighbors’ good.