

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.

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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?”

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~~

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 . . .

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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 . . .

“Hey, wait a minute!

How is it these guys
Who worked only nine hours

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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.

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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

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“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?

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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

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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.

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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 then 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,

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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 than 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

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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.

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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.