

WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

A sermon for Sunday, September 24, 2017, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba

Parables of the Kingdom

Gospel: **Matthew 20:1-16** ¹“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ²He agreed to pay them a denarius[a] for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ⁷“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ⁸“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ⁹“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹²‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

When I say to friends at work, “How are you doing this morning,” some say, “**I am blessed and highly favored.**” **Yes! Blessed and highly favored!** God is in the business of blessing people that are willing to serve Him. Serving God is in itself a blessing. Peter, like many of us, wondered, saying “**Lord, we have left everything and followed You, what shall we have?**” (Matthew 19:27) I know we have been called to serve the Lord as evangelists, Sunday school teachers, Church Council members, liturgists, missionaries, etc. Some have served longer than others. Young or old, seasoned or unseasoned, God called us to serve. “**...what shall we have?**” Peter wondered!!!

Jesus assured him, saying “**...you, who have followed me, will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**”(v.28) Then, He added, “**everyone,**” including you and me “**will receive a hundred times as much, and will inherit eternal life.**”(v.29) Note this, “**But many who are first will be last.**”(v.30)

Peter and his fellow disciples were veterans--original followers, the early morning workers. They and the Lord laid down the foundation upon which we are building. Yet, Jesus promised that “**the first will be last.**” Peter and we are **co-workers** in the Vineyard, joining the many others of **every time** and **every place**.

God took the first initiative of calling and providing Grace.

God’s Grace started with the CREATION of man.

It is by GRACE that we were created.

It’s by **God’s grace** that God also created **time**.

It’s by **God’s grace** that God provides us with **time to work**.

It is by **God’s grace** that God **pays His laborers a wage**. Regardless of the time worked

- we all earn eternal life.

It is by **God's grace** that the workers are provided a field or a vineyard; a place to work.

It's God's purpose to constantly call people and equip them for the **work of ministry**. **Grace upon grace**. God is the **equal opportunity** employer who **promises a fair and equal payment for all who agree to work for Him**.

Time worked or seniority doesn't count to receive a payment. God tirelessly seeks people from early in the **morning**; goes back at the **THIRD hour**, and at the **SIXTH hour**, at the **NINETH hour**, at the **ELEVENTH hour**, to hire people. **God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves**.

With plenty of **Grace and compassion He cares** for our cares. With **mercy and compassion He reaches to every individual**. He never gives up **on anyone**. But God gives us the freewill to follow Our consciences, hearts, thoughts. We can **choose** to open up or be **less sensitive, ego-centric, hard**. It is not God's desire to force anyone into serving Him. We are free to refuse His call or accept it.

The men in the parable were **waiting on the Lord and were hired**. "*They that wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength. They will mount up with wings of eagles.*"(Isa.40:30) The men in the parable had the **willingness to wait**; the **openness to serve God**. **In each man's heart and mind** there was a pull, a voice, a thought, a movement to listen and turn to God.

There is a responsibility in each person to desire to serve the Lord. There must be a **willing**, a **desire** to serve and withstand the heat for God offers to all a **forceful call**. The response is ours.

It is absurd that those who agreed to be paid as they were paid grumbled at that pay; they complained, they murmured despite the grace given to them; a field, a vineyard, work, pay -- how would they dare to grumble after **God has given them so much**?

God promised to give "**Whatsoever is right**" and **He did**. No mention of the amount but He gives us *what is right*. The **early morning veteran** got *what is right*. The **latecomer** got *what is right*. The thief on the cross with Jesus got *what is right* as promised - to be **with the Lord in paradise**.

Why would anyone regard **God's favor** as unfair? By definition, FAVOR cannot be FAIR!!!

At times **it seems Favor** granted toward one person **provokes envy, frustration, and aggravation** in others. **Some people make a career out of envy**. Grace for one is not a cause for celebration in others. Instead, controversies break out when somebody in our midst is blessed. One would think that people would celebrate with somebody who receives God's favor and blessing. Remember, WE are all co-workers in the vineyard. **Entrance into God's Kingdom is a matter of privilege**, not merit. It is FAVOR; it is undeserved GRACE.

None of us is **superior** to another. The first will be last since **time served** and **position** aren't promised. It is absurd that a clay pot would argue with its Maker. A servant, meaning a Christian, has no right judging another Christian or judging God. Justice belongs to God and God is just!!!

Amen.