

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
9/24/2023

## A DIFFERENT LOGIC

This is one of the most curious parables of Jesus. As always, it's important to pay attention to what is being said. Sometimes the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a vineyard but here it is said to be like the landowner. What does he do?

He invites workers into his vineyard, again and again. Count it up and five times in one day he goes out and he invites others in. There's an urgency here. The time of the grape harvest is followed soon by the rainy season so it's imperative to get the crop harvested as soon as possible. One person can pick a lot of grapes in a single hour. God, who is love, calls out to others in love, and he does so constantly. We might not be ready to hear that, or we might put up barriers but God can continue to call. People may answer that call at different times but like that landowner, God desires a response. God is love. God loves us and God desires our love. So far, so good but then things get complicated.

Not only is this landowner inviting and calling. He is generous, very generous. You could say he is ridiculously generous, illogically generous. Obviously, the next day no one will want to work for him until 5:00. The most important point of understanding this parable is to understand what it is not about. Commenting on this, Pope Francis has said, *Jesus is not speaking about work and fair wages — that is another problem — but about the Kingdom of God and the goodness of the heavenly Father who goes out continually to invite, and he pays everyone the maximum amount.*

There's a different logic at work here. It's not the logic of math or economics but the logic of generosity and love. God's love is inviting and overflowing. Think of those who have truly loved and served God from their earliest days and then think of hardened criminals who make a sincere but literally last minute conversion before dying. Those who truly love God won't experience envy at the last minute

conversion of the others; they will rejoice that God's grace has finally been at work in those people.

The logic of economics is important in its own place but so is the logic of generous love. To cry out, *That's not fair* may be understandable but there's something else at play. Then as now, day laborers were near the bottom of the social order with no job security, no benefits and easily subject to exploitation. Even slaves were considered to be members of the household and had some security.

Then as now, day laborers made meager wages at best. An hour's worth of work would earn next to nothing. The earlier workers had a verbal contract. There's no mention of this to the latter ones but he shows them some compassion. The daily wage was enough to live on for a day. Without it, a worker and his family might go hungry that night. So another way of looking at it is that this man is showing compassion and mercy that reflects the compassion and mercy of God.

*Are you envious because I am generous?* Sad to say but the answer can be yes. Sometimes we can all experience some envy and jealousy and it's not a good feeling. While this parable focuses first on the outrageous love of God, it also warns us about the danger of jealousy. Envy and jealousy are like evil twins. They cause us to concentrate on what we don't have, not what we do have. They lead us to look at others, to compare ourselves to them rather than to concentrate on who we are in Christ. And they can be emotionally tiring, leading people to make comparisons and to act out of their own insecurities. If envy and jealousy are the ailments, the remedy is to be found in gratitude. One concentrates on what we don't have, the other focuses on what we do have. Gratitude prompts us to see everything as a gift and so preserves us from entitlement.

The Shoes of the Fisherman is a 1968 academy awarding winning film. In it an old Vatican cardinal, feels put off by the new pope thinking he deserves better for his years of service but eventually gets over his entitlement and tells the pope, *None of us deserves anything but the promised wage for the worker in the vineyard*. When

tempted by envy, jealousy or entitlement, it can be helpful to stop and make an act of thanksgiving for all that we do have.

What we do have includes our faith in Jesus, the human face of God. Jesus calls us Sunday after Sunday to come together as the people of God, to be nourished by his word, fed by his Body and Blood, to be strengthened by him and to strengthen one another as we follow him together in the Holy Spirit to God the Father. As we share in the Eucharist, we share in the hour of Jesus' death and resurrection, his Paschal Mystery as he gives himself generously to us. With lives of intentional faith, may we always answer that call and may we invite others to share in the gift that we have received. May we rejoice when others join the work of God at whatever stage and mirror to others God's generous love. In matters of economy, may we follow the logic of economics but in matters of love, may we follow the different logic of God's generous merciful love.