

## **Grace and Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...**

Jesus says to us, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”*

In Jesus’ day, these day laborers were people who had no land to farm, no steady employment... They were like today's migrant workers... or like those who stand on street corners in Lakewood, or Freehold looking for work; they were dependent upon others for employment in order to feed, clothe, and shelter their families... they were the most powerless and dependent people in Israel (even more powerless than slaves because there was no guarantee that they would be fed)...

And the truth is, we all say to ourselves, “Thank God we’re not them”...

In fact, most - if not all of us, have a deep aversion to this sort of powerlessness... because no one wants to lose their independence... or end up in a nursing home, sitting in a wheel chair all day, or relying upon others to do for us what we used to do for ourselves... where our choices have been taken away...

But what Jesus is trying to get us to see in this parable - is that these day laborers closely mirror who we really are (deep down)... because (whether we realize it or not - **we are already dependent**)... dependent on God’s grace and generosity to give us not only life in this world – but also in the world to come...

You know, the word “dependent” actually derives from the root that means “to hang.”... To give you a simple illustration, a chandelier that hangs from a hook in the ceiling is dependent on that hook... Of course, if that hook should fail, then it all comes crashing down in utter brokenness...

Which is why being dependent on something or someone – is scary (especially in a world that seldom keeps its promises)... we have to trust it first... or have faith in it – before we hang on...

And of course, like it was in the parable, sometimes you’re starting from an unknown...

The landowner doesn’t know whether the laborers will do a good job, and the workers don’t know whether the landowner will pay...

But the landowner first trusts the workers to work, and the laborers trust the landowner will keep his promise to pay the standard wage, (a denarius), an amount that was sufficient to feed and clothe a family for at least a day...

Now, we know from Jesus' parable that some work the full 12 hours, while others are hired later and work only 9, 6, 3, or even just a single hour... And at the end of the day, all are paid the same amount.

But when those who worked the full 12 hours discover that they are paid the same (1 denarius for their work) what do they do?... They complain 'it's not fair!'

And in some sense, they're right... It's not fair...

On the other hand, why weren't they complaining when they were the only ones hired and others were not?... That wasn't fair either...

But the truth is, all of those workers started the day in the same predicament: **they were all dependent**... something they forgot along the way...

Oh, no doubt they gave thanks for the blessing of having work, that their hungry children would have food on the table that night, that there would be less fighting and more rejoicing, more cheerful laughter ringing in their ears because stomachs were full...

But when it came time to be paid - what they failed to see in all of it - was the *gift* that they were given... they falsely believed they deserved more - even though they arrived that morning with nothing... and they forgot how truly dependent they were...

And maybe that's what's wrong with the world even today (maybe that's wrong with us)?... so many of us believe we're entitled, or that we're owed something in this world, - and what gets in the way of our faith (or having gratitude) is when we start believing that God owes us something...

The truth is that God owes us nothing - but we owe Him every bit of our heart - for something as simple as each breath - because that breath has given us life (and the opportunity to live - and to love - and to learn about who we are as Children of God)...

What Jesus' parable is teaching us this morning is that: yes, we are dependent on a 'Higher Power other than ourselves' - to sustain us - and support us - and see us through this world...

But Jesus also wants us to reflect on how we might go about our lives... will we complain by saying that 'life is unfair' (like some did in the vineyard)... that somehow we got cheated...

Or can we find the roses in the garden?... can we look for God's grace in our lives?... Will we allow ourselves to see the goodness in each day (and the blessing that none of us could ever deserve)?... Will we remind ourselves that we came into this world with nothing - and whatever we have received - is a gift?...

I think if we can spend each day doing that – we will have understood the heart of Jesus – who simply is reminding us this morning – that everything we have is a gift - and thank God for each one... A gift as small as a breath...

You and I am blessed more than we allow ourselves to realize... I mean that!... and we can only love because God loved us first...

I read a story the other day about a family who had 4 children, and were awaiting the birth of a fifth... The family all gathered at the hospital, joyfully expectant, and the baby girl was born perfectly, except that she had no arms and no legs...

Being a resilient family, they set out to give her as many advantages in life as they could, and though she lived to be only 21, her father insisted that she was one of the most amazing people he had ever met:

a brilliant mind, a wonderful sense of humor, and an amazing capacity for friendship... And not once in her 21 years of life, was she able to feed or dress herself or do any of the things that most of us tend to take for granted.

One Easter, her older brother brought home his college roommate, a philosophy major who liked to put life under a microscope and analyze it critically.

After three days, the roommate asked the sister, "What keeps you from blowing up in anger at whatever kind of God that would have let you be born into this world in this condition?.. How do you stop from being a volcano of resentment?"

Looking him dead in the eye, she responded, “Compared to others, what I have may not seem like much, but listen, I have been able to see and hear... I’ve been able to smell, taste, and feel so much love”.

“I have been exposed to some of the greatest literature ever written, and heard some of the finest music ever composed... I’ve had some of the greatest friendships that anybody could ever have... and I know that what I have - may not seem like much - when compared to others, **but when compared to not having lived at all, I would not have missed it for anything!**”

You know, Jesus said, *The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.*

And I want you to remember that God has already chosen you (which is why you’re here this morning)... He has blessed you with the gift of salvation, to work in His kingdom so that you may have life and have it more abundantly, despite whatever shape it may take...

But the question is – how will you receive it?....

Will you live your life complaining?...

Or will you live your life in gratitude – understanding that we come into this world with nothing – and will leave the same way...

Be blessed to know that God’s love is a gift to all of us, your soul is in the care of our Lord, and whatever sin we have committed can be forgiven by God...

May God’s peace rest in your heart and may you leave all fear in His arms...

Let us all go in peace!!!!

As such, you each have a choice to make: will you receive this unfair, unearned gift joyfully or will you complain that it's not fair? You can choose to complain,

choose to live life from the point of view of scarcity which will deform you, body and soul, or you can choose God's joy and generosity which will transform your life.

The choice is yours, though Jesus urges you today, "Choose life." Amen.