

Does That Seem Fair?

[Matthew 20:1-16](#)

Does this parable sit well with anyone? Does it seem fair? Today's scripture presents us with quite a different view of how things should be. We also get a glimpse of God's grace.

Just before Jesus presents the Parable of the Vineyard, Jesus was approached by a very wealthy man, asking Jesus what he must do to be saved. Jesus instructs him to go and sell all he has to inherit treasures in heaven. I mentioned before that I had a chance to be a part of the play, 'Fiddler on the Roof.' There is a scene where Tevya, the poor milkman, sings his famous song, 'If I Were a Rich Man', after which his wife tells him that wealth is a curse. Tevya then looks up to heaven and says, "Curse me God, curse me." [Matthew 19:22](#) says the rich man Jesus was addressing "went away sad, for he had great wealth." Jesus then says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye

of a needle then for a rich man to enter heaven. By our standards it sounds impossible. However in Jesus' day, when the gates of the city were closed for the evening, later arrivals would have to come in through a very small, side gate known as a needle. For camels, they would have to be stripped completely and get down on their knees and crawl through – it was a very difficult but not an impossible task. In verse 26, Jesus says, “with man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.”

In Palestine, there are basically 2 seasons – the dry season and the wet season. The grape harvest occurs toward the end of September just before the rainy/wet season begins in October. The marketplace was where day laborers would gather with their tools and they would stay there until someone would come and hire them. Some would stay all day hoping to even do an hour's

work in order to receive something to help support their families.

Immediately following this discussion of wealth, Jesus presents the parable of the vineyard, where a landowner goes to the marketplace five times during the day to hire workers for his vineyard. Each time the landowner is able to acquire workers to help bring in the harvest before the rain hits. We are all fine with this parable right up until the time of payment. Those who had only worked the last hour of the day received the same pay as those who had labored all day in the hot sun. This doesn't seem fair, does it? When the landowner pays a day's wage to the workers who only worked one hour, shouldn't those who worked all day receive more? In human terms, yes, but what if this parable has nothing to do with a day's pay for a day's work. Maybe the parable is giving us an example of God's grace.

If you look at the table of contents in your Hymnal, the types of grace named reflect a Wesleyan understanding of grace. God's Prevenient Grace is ever present and equal for everyone, similar to the day's wage given to all workers from the landowner. God's grace is always available to us and is given to anyone who wishes to receive it. We have seen this all throughout the Bible particularly with the Israelites as they wandered through the desert. Time and again they would turn away from God's covenant, yet God remained faithful, always ready to welcome them back as His children. How often have we strayed from God's will only to also be welcomed back. Prevenient Grace – always available; always there.

The second type of grace is known as Justifying Grace. When we accept God's grace for ourselves, we then become justified as it were. God extended a hand and we accepted. It is

similar to the workers in the marketplace – we answered the call to work in the field. We accepted our day’s wage for ourselves. God seeks a relationship with His people. God wants us to take up the challenge to love and serve God in all we do. When God extends grace to us, it is up to us to step forward and receive it. God’s grace becomes personal for us. It is God’s gift to us, but we need to accept it. That is Justifying Grace.

The third type of grace is Sanctifying Grace. Once we have accepted God’s grace for ourselves, we begin a faith journey. As we continue on our walk with God, God refines us to be more like Christ. We are striving toward perfection. Sometimes it literally feels like being tried by fire. For some it would be much more comfortable to just sit back, accept God’s Justifying Grace, but never continue toward Sanctifying Grace. Like I talked with the kids, sometimes we get stuck in the refrigerator

and when God calls us, we are unable to respond. God is calling us to meet the needs of this community. As we answer that call, God is refining us as individuals to be more like Christ. I wanted to highlight a few of the mission/community projects that Mount Tabor is involved, through the leadership of the UMW:

- Looking for ways to support the battered women's shelter in Laytonsville – they are currently in need of cookware.
- The Ronald McDonald House – a visit planned and possible support.
- Today's UMW meeting includes a guest speaker from the SanMar Children's Home in Boonsboro.
- \$250 was sent to provide supply buckets for the mid west area affected by flooding.
- School supplies are still being collected for needy children to help out Community Ministries.
- Other mission opportunities are being explored including Care Bears, where bears are knitted to send to children in other countries.
- The prayer shawl project has distributed 8 prayer shawls to our elderly members.

Extending God's hand of grace to others is a part of what we do

as followers of Christ. We are the workers in the field knowing that our ultimate reward waits for us in heaven. We have received God's grace and have accepted it for ourselves. That is God's gift to us offered without price. We cannot earn God's love. Yet we have said to the landowner, "I will work in your field." We are putting faith and works together.

I think of the people in the marketplace – each one at different times during the day had to accept the landowner's offer. The landowner never forces anyone to work in the vineyard. The offer is made and must be accepted. I have never worked in a vineyard, but I can imagine that it is not the most glamorous of jobs. The dry season in Palestine was just that – dry. I'm sure it was difficult, tedious and sometimes challenging work. The reward for the laborers was a day's wage - an opportunity to survive another day. The laborers in the

marketplace could have chosen not to work in the field. We serve a polite God. God does not force grace upon us. We are invited to begin a faith journey with an assurance that our ultimate reward awaits us in heaven.

I would like to close with one of Vivian's poems entitled What a Wonderful World We Live In (pg. 39).

That's it – accepting God's grace for ourselves and sharing God's gift with others as we proceed on our journey through God's sanctifying grace. Amen.