

**Exodus 16:2-15**

16:2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

16:3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

16:5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

16:6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt,

16:7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?"

16:8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him--what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

16:9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"

16:10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

16:11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said,

16:12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

16:13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

16:14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.

16:15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

**Matthew 20:1-16 "Parable of the Landowner's Generosity"**

20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

20:2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

20:3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace;

20:4 and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they

went.

20:5 When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.

20:6 And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?'

20:7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'

20:8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.'

20:9 When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.

20:10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.

20:11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner,

20:12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

20:13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?'

20:14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.

20:15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

20:16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

### **Proclamation of the Word**

Earlier this week I met with my favorite sermon advisor and editor, my husband Chuck. Chuck and I were discussing this passage from Matthew's gospel. Then he proceeded to tell me that on this same day in his Biology class he did the usual homework check. For some reason, he was feeling generous or to be more honest, tired. He asked everyone to pull out his or her homework, but instead of checking their work this day. They would all get full credit. You would think he had asked for their first born child. The ones who worked extra hard, crossed their 't's' and dotted their 'i's' were the most upset. They wanted earned credit. It just is not fair if someone did not do the work to get full credit. The ones who perhaps forgot to finish their homework just looked relieved. Chuck said, "Are you mad because I am being merciful?"

Yes!

"Are you envious because I am generous?" the landowner asked the laborers who had worked all day long and were paid the same as those who came late to the game. We can probably guess that those who had harvested grapes all day in the hot sun replied, "YES!"

As we can tell from both passages of Scripture, human nature has not changed much over the last several thousand years! The children of Israel just a couple of months into their new freedom from

slavery and Pharaoh are already complaining about their conditions, so God rains down on them manna, bread from heaven, and quails. Manna literally means, "What is it?" They are not sure. But they will learn to trust God and know God provides for them. In the same way the day laborers will know that the Landowner is generous and provides for daily bread regardless of ability or earning it.

But, it is still not fair. Yes. It is not fair.

Chuck and I taught our kids a cruel song early on. When they would beg for a toy or ask for things that were not good for them like an extra bowl of ice cream, we would sing the Rolling Stones song, "You can't always get what you want." They hated it. They caught on though because once when Hallie was asking Avery for something he did not wish to share, we heard him sing, "You can't always get what you want." If you know the rest of the lyrics, "but if you try sometimes you get what you need"

Life is not fair, but God is generous. Each person got what he or she needed, daily bread. Whether manna and quail or a day's wages to feed themselves, each gets what he or she needs.

In a classical understanding of the parable relates to salvation. When one professes faith in Jesus whether early in life or on a deathbed, God who is merciful will save each one equally. This is indeed one level of understanding of the parable. But as we understand the parable in its context, we see the economic, daily issues facing workers in Jesus' day. The all day workers are most upset that those who worked less are treated equally, meaning equal pay for less work. No fair! But consider this: The owner tells all the workers that he will pay them what is right. It is right that living creatures have enough to live on. The parable shows us a God who righteous- meaning persons having enough of what they need, daily bread. "Give us this day our daily bread," we pray. God is the source of all we need.

Consider also who it is that gets overlooked, who is not going to get hired. It is the disabled, helpless, quiet, and the weak.

We live in a world where not everyone gets what they need even. Inequity of resources is reality. Migrant workers work 16 hour days so they can have food and shelter. Children and teenagers in Bangladesh do work for dollars a week in factories to make us cheap shoe to buy.

Karen Ellers, Director of Clemson Community Care, shared a story of a client a few weeks ago. This is a woman who has always held full-time work, but occasionally cannot make ends meet, so she would come to CCC for assistance with a bill or some food. Just recently, this older woman, through no fault of her own, had her hours cut by her employer to just 29 hours a week. At minimum wage after taxes is approximately \$189.00 a week, which she may or may not be paid since SC has no minimum wage. This woman has raised children, two of whom have gone to college. She has accomplished no small feat, but yet, she is not able to work enough to make ends meet. On the other hand, Karen confesses

that there are those who will always need assistance and are unable to work, or read a bill, or manage money.

Our popular notion of Justice is "fair and equal," but this parable paints a picture of God's Justice-provision, enough. God is the rightful Owner of all things, and God gets to decide. If we see ourselves primarily as the first workers, we feel their indignation and envy. But try putting yourself in the other person's place. If you have been overlooked all day, you begin to feel like the last kid picked for the team in gym class. Not only are you humiliated, but you have no hope of eating, of having enough to live on. Then to be treated with such generosity, your heart would burst with surprise. You would be so grateful to the gracious owner.

This week, a distraught couple walked into the church. The man and woman looked weary and travel worn. They asked for a place to stay. When Judy called *Our Daily Rest*, the shelter in Seneca, they suggested calling the Anderson Salvation Army shelter. The woman started crying. The man asked to speak to the Pastor. The story came out. They had been in Anderson searching for help for 4 days. They rode here with a friend from Jacksonville, FL whose car had been impounded. The friend was in jail. Obviously, poor choices had been made perhaps even illegal activities. Yet, they had been turned away from every church in Anderson and told at the shelter that they had to work and pay to stay overnight. They were told to leave Anderson and try Clemson, Seneca, or Easley for help. So the CAT bus brought them here. The person at the CAT suggested they go knock on the doors of churches for a place to spend the night since one can be arrested for sleeping outside. The woman broke down and said she just wanted to go home. She said she had a job, a dog, and a home. They were stuck. I wondered if the wear and age on their faces was really the effects of substance abuse.

Then I realized that for the cost of two nights in a cheap hotel, they could get home to Jacksonville, Florida on the Greyhound bus. In 20 minutes we figured out how to buy bus tickets online and how to get from the CAT bus to ICAR.

When I came out and told them what I had worked out, the woman, who had been hoping for a dry, indoor place to sleep, was shocked. She was overwhelmed with tears. All they could say is "This is so generous. How can we thank you? We never expected to be able to get home this way. You don't know how wonderful home is until you cannot get there."

When she asked again about how to thank us, I told them that they could thank Fort Hill church people who love God and love their neighbors. They wished they could repay the church. I told them they could simply praise God who is the generous and gracious one. It is God who gives us what we need. When it comes to manna and money, God is always merciful.

Our Scripture points us to a God who is gracious and gives us what we need. We in turn can be channels of that same grace to others. You and I may be the only Jesus, the only witness, that someone may meet. Frederick Buechner writes with such clarity:

*We have it in us to be Christs to each other and maybe in some unimaginable way to God too - that's what we have to tell finally. We have it in us to work miracles of love and healing as well as to have them worked upon us. We have it in us to bless with him and forgive with him and heal with him and once in a while maybe even to grieve with some measure of his grief at another's pain and to rejoice with some measure of his rejoicing at another's joy almost as if it were our own.<sup>i</sup>*

Indeed, people need to hear the good news of salvation and live their lives pointed toward that heavenly kingdom in the sweet bye and bye. But for some of us, good news can come in the form of an "I forgive you" or a bag of groceries from Clemson Community Care or a bus ticket for stranded travelers. Good news looks like enough work and income to live on, enough kindness to make it through the day, and enough love to sustain our hearts. Sometimes in the face of a health issue, we need just enough good news to help us enjoy today and the gift of loved ones with whom to share it. Sometimes we just need enough...not more.

It is God who is generous and cares for all God's children, equally. Instead of being envious, let us be grateful, for at one time or another we will be the one in need.

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<sup>i</sup>Quote from Frederick Buechner, from *A Room Called Remember*, (HarperOne: New York, 1992)