



The Economy of God – Touchpoint for September 20, 2023

Matthew 20:1-16 (NIV) The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

20 *“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.”

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

It is said the “Kingdom of Heaven” is another way of saying, “If God were in charge right now, how would we operate?” In the time of this parable, when the grapes were ripe, there was a small window to harvest before the heavy rains followed. Workers were needed. It was a desperate race to capture the grapes before the heavy rains were to come and ruin the harvest.

Because of the need for workers, it was an opportunity for those not connected to families as slaves or servants to get work. The slaves and servants knew that they were not going to starve. They had consistent work. Those who were not connected to a family waited in the marketplace in a public labor pool, if you will, to get work. Their families and children were at risk of starvation all the time.

In this parable, Jesus is saying the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, or the economy of God is such that no one will starve on his watch because they all received the same. The four pence, the normal pay for a day’s work was barely enough as it was. The times mentioned appear to correlate with the times of the Jewish day. (William Barclay, Studylight)

If we were to apply this understanding of God's economy to our present situation, how might we live if God were in charge? I say 'if' because our kingdoms usually have us in charge. We might need to check our own inner morality cop when others take cuts. By the way, do you notice we get upset when the cuts are taken in front of us, but not behind us? We might have to let go of our "I deserve this" mentality.

In the kingdom of ambition, we want what we think we deserve. Isn't it scary to ponder what would happen if we demanded from God what we think we deserve and we received it? What if God's economy was like ours?

Would God grumble if we took cuts in front of him? Would God stand up in Congress, calling for the elimination of entitlements without giving up his own free life insurance and health care? Can we get a better deal than immortality? Hmm... I'm going to ask my broker!

We want the God created in our heads to bring retribution to others, rather than grace and mercy. After all, it's what is fair. What if God passed by the Home Depot in a van to pick up all the undocumented workers, promising them work, but instead took them to immigration? Would he have created a work demand to end poverty, all the while supporting a meritocracy?

We say we only want what is fair. The economy of people says, "I got mine, screw you." The economy of God says, "We are all *receivers* of grace and mercy."

There is power in being the giver that looks a lot like humility. Yet below the surface, you take pride in working overtime to not be a receiver.

I heard of a therapist whose client was known as a generous giver.

The therapist asked her, "Is there a contingent of perpetual, good-hearted givers?" We lined them up.

"Where would you place yourself?"

Humbly she said, "I think around the middle."

He said, "So, assume everybody's job is to give to those behind them. What would be the job of the last person in line?"

She appeared stumped for a while and then said, "To receive?"

There is no one for the last one in line to give to. That person's job, in that moment and time, is to be a recipient. Being a recipient renders us powerless, but it is the greatest source of freedom and intimacy because its freedom comes from gratitude, vulnerability and a willingness to receive without apology, and with no justification. That would be the refashioning of "I worked all day so I deserve to be the recipient."

There's a lot more that can be said to be in the position of the receiver. It takes us out of our puritanistic purpose for living. Instead, it makes our purpose *to be the recipient of all of God's love with no expectations*. Outside of the economy of God, we might say. There has to be some responsibilities for this kind of love. You see, God is not against effort. God is against earning, so his love comes without expectations. We are compelled to do good things to show grace and to offer mercy because of the undeserved love we've been given. I encourage you to do that work until you fall backward into the deep refreshing waters of unconditional love.

In the kingdom of heaven, it may not be fair, but is it right?

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)
Be Still, know that I am God

Calm Me, Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Healer of Our Every Ill

(Marty Haugan)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow.
Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.
You who know our fears and sadness.
Grace us with your peace and gladness.
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*
In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding
Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.