

**March 5, 2017**  
**Matthew 20.1-16**  
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Today we begin a mini preaching series for the season of Lent, diving into Jesus' parables.

As a reminder, parables are short stories that Jesus uses to teach.

But just because they are short, doesn't mean that they are cute...parables are *hard*. They have a cutting edge, a twist that is intended to make us uncomfortable.

Today's parable is the *Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard*.

The story begins with a landowner going out early in the morning to the market to hire people to work in his vineyard. He agrees to pay them the usual daily wage.

At 9 AM, he again goes out, sees people who aren't working, and hires them.

He goes back at noon and at 3, again hiring those who are without work.

Finally, he goes back at 5, finds people who *still* haven't been hired, and sends *them* out to the vineyard.

When the day ends, it's time for the landowner to pay up.

He starts with the last people hired, and in a *shocking* move he pays them the usual daily wage.

They'd worked for less than an hour, and yet they received the same wage as someone who had worked for *12* hours.

News of this soon spreads to those who had been working for longer. Since these newcomers had received such a generous salary, the ones who had worked *all day* assumed that *they* would receive a substantial *boost* to their pay!

...but that didn't happen.

When they received the usual daily wage (which *was* the agreed upon amount) they began to grumble: "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!"

It isn't *fair* that they should be paid the exact *same* amount as people who *only* worked for *one* hour.

*They* did more work, so they should be *paid* more!

*They* worked through the blisteringly hot noonday sun, so they should get a special *bonus*!

It isn't *fair* that these *slackers* should be made equal to the long-suffering, hard-working laborers who toiled *all* day!

And why hadn't anybody hired these guys earlier?

Why weren't they around when the landowner was hiring people at 9, or noon, or even 3?

It *must* be because they're lazy! It *must* be because they want *everything* handed to them; they don't want to take *responsibility* for themselves, they just *expect* that someone's always going to take care of them!

Why should people like *this* get anything at all? Why not give the money and the work to people who are *actually* going to appreciate the opportunity they've been given?

It's hard for us to find fault with this argument.

Would any of *us* want to be in this situation, having put in a full day's work, only to find out the freeloader who arrived just before closing got pay equal to us?

No!

It wouldn't be *fair* to us for our bosses to pay us the *same amount*, when *we* did *so much more work!*

“These last worked only *one* hour, and you have made them *equal* to us!’  
But the landowner replied, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not *allowed* to do what *I* choose with what belongs to *me*? Or are you *envious* because I am *generous*?’”

This, brothers and sisters in Christ, is the hard, cutting-edge of this parable.  
The truth is that God is *not* fair.

God's grace is not fair.

God's love is not fair.

God's love *is* equal, and it *is* generous...but it is not fair.

Fairness is a human concept. It's what *we* use to size people up, to tally a person's good deeds and bad, assessing where they fit in.

The higher up you are, the more you get, and the lower you are...

I mean, it's only *fair* to do it this way, right? Everyone gets what he or she deserves.

You study for a test, you do well on the test; you get an 'A.'

You slack off, you do poorly; you get an 'F.' ...you fail.

But God isn't interested in being fair. Because if God *was* fair, then we'd *all* fail. We'd all get big, fat, red, 'F's.

*None* of us can measure up to the standard God has set.

*None* of us can do enough to *earn* God's love.

So God doesn't play the 'fair' game.

God simply loves us, without exception.

God loves us all, *generously*...and *equally*.

It doesn't matter how long or hard you've worked.

It doesn't matter how much or how little good you've done.

It doesn't even matter how afraid you are, how ashamed you are, or how hopeful you are, or how joyful you are...

God loves us all *equally*.

Jesus died for us all *equally*.

Jesus rose for us all *equally*.

The twist in this parable is that God is *equally* generous to *all* people.

Let's not kid ourselves; this is a very hard truth for us, who are enmeshed in an economic and social system that prizes certain people over others, that values certain work over others, that promises stability for us and our families if we simply work hard enough and are responsibly enough; but this promise is all-too often just an empty shell.

Which is why God rejects this. God doesn't make empty promises.

Jesus died for *all* people, *equally*, regardless of the circumstances of our lives.

God isn't fair...and that's a *very – good – thing!*