

Copper Creek Church

Parables: Week 4

*Laborers in the Vineyard*

June 23 & 26, 2022

For the last week, I've been on a trip with 6 of our youth members and Adam Bear. We went to Montreat, North Carolina, for a youth conference with roughly 800 of our closest friends. That was quite an adventure that I am sure you will hear more about over the next few weeks. The theme of this conference was "More Than Enough." We learned about the lie of scarcity. We learned about the abundance of God's love and grace, and most importantly, we learned that we- humanity- are more than enough because of God and their love for us.

Being with a youth group for a week is quite an adventure. If you ever get a chance to go on a youth trip, and if you have several days to sleep afterward, do it. I truly believe you will learn more than you even thought possible about your own faith and your faith journey. Youth have a tendency to question everything. Even the things that adults have stopped questioning. They also make inside jokes quite quickly and they remain long past their prime. This particular quirk of a youth trip was helped by the fact that Adam is a new dad... he has quickly grown into his Dad Joke Abilities. By the end of the week, we'd had More Than Enough of our share of Dad Jokes... In fact- I am pretty sure there is a ban on the phrase "more than enough" because of how many things we used it to describe. And yet, here we are... Our parable today is a story of there being More Than Enough. This parable comes from the book of Matthew, chapter 20, verses 1 to 16. I am reading from the Common English Bible translation.

Workers in the vineyard

**20** "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. **2** After he agreed with the workers to pay them a denarion, he sent them into his vineyard.

**3** "Then he went out around nine in the morning and saw others standing around the marketplace doing nothing. **4** He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I'll pay you whatever is right.' **5** And they went. "Again around noon and then at three in the afternoon, he did the same thing. **6** Around five in the afternoon he went and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you just standing around here doing nothing all day long?' **7** "'Because nobody has hired us,' they replied. "He responded, 'You also go into the vineyard.'

**8** "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the workers and give them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on finally to the first.' **9** When those who were hired at five in the afternoon came, each one received a denarion. **10** Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarion. **11** When they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, **12** 'These who were hired last worked one hour, and they received the same pay as we did even though we had to work the whole day in the hot sun.'

**13** "But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn't I agree to pay you a denarion? **14** Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the

same as I give to you. **15** Don't I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I'm generous?'

**16** So those who are last will be first. And those who are first will be last."

Surely you've heard of this line before- those who are last will be first and those who are first shall be last? It's used a lot when lining up for food at a potluck, or when kids are fighting over who's turn it is to play with a toy. But here's the thing- I'm a middle child. Fairness has always been a big part of my life and seeking justice in unfair situations seemed to be my calling even as a kid. And for clarification- yes I do mean seeking justice when one of my siblings was getting more of shrimp (our collective favorite food) for dinner, more Barbie play time, or more time in front of the TV than I was. Hearing that the last was first and the first was last wasn't really in my understanding. But, in my head, if you tried the hardest, if you were the best at your task- you got to be first. This is how it always worked. I have many years of experiences that say experience means you get to go first. Jobs, siblings, school. I really struggle to find a time where the opposite is true and it actually works out to be that the last is first and the first is last.

I told you a little about the conference from last week. We were attending the youth conference that Montreat puts on each summer. There are 6 weeks of these conferences, but the theme is the same and the leadership changes for every set of 2. The theme this summer (more than enough.) Over all, the concept that they wanted us to understand from the week as a whole is that we are enough, more than enough, with God's help and love. We, humanity, don't need to be everything for everyone because God is already everything. We don't have to worry about fixing everything in everyone's life because we are enough exactly as God creates us to be. The beginning of the week was spent kind of dissecting our current ideas around what "enough" is. In the last 2 years, we've experienced the world in a completely different way than in the years before. We watched people hoard lysol wipes, hand sanitizer, toilet paper. We rushed to the store to make sure we had enough of what we needed because we didn't know when we would need just a little more. Even now, we see the world that has created a bidding war out of having fresh meat in stores, gasoline prices, and most importantly- the health and safety of humans. It is horrifying. It feels like there is never enough. And then, we read this scripture, and we learn that the first are to be last and the last are to be first.

It really feels counterintuitive to tell everyone all about the scarcity in our world and then explain that we are all more than enough. In the beginning of the week, it was explained in a way that has stuck with me- "scarcity is a false god that turns us against our neighbors." Who can honestly say they haven't experienced that concept in the last 2 years. "Scarcity is a false god that turns us against our neighbors". We, as people, it seems like it is our nature to assume that when there is more than enough, we deserve more.

Turning back to our parable for this week, we see several groups of people. The first group we see are the go-getters! These are the folks up early, ready to work. They knew who needed help in the fields and who was in charge. And they knew they'd get paid at the end of the

day! Lucky them! We always love a good payday. They knew what they were getting into for the day of work.

So, the go-getters are off to work! But the land owner needs more help- so he goes to find more and more people, every three hours or so, he sends more people into the fields. Until finally, we get to the end of the workday. It's roughly an hour left to work- and one last time- the land owner goes into the town to find people to finish working in the fields for the day. He sends out the last group with an hour left. At the end of the day, when the work is done, everyone lines up to get their payment for the day.

Now, there aren't actually any problems in this story until the go-getters realize that the late-comers are getting an equal amount of pay. So, everyone's getting the denarion they earned for working that day, and the go-getters get to the front of the line. Ready to get their paycheck! Surely it's going to be even more right? They worked for hours and hours more than the people who just got handed a denarion! ALRIGHT! Nice payday comin up! But they only get paid what they had agreed to. They get the same amount of money as everyone else, regardless of how many more hours they worked or what they accomplished.

“More than enough” vs. “I deserve more”

I'm going to ask you a question, and I want you to really think about it. Because there is definitely a right answer, but I'm telling you ahead of time- so it's not manipulative. Okay- here's the question. Where are you in this story? Who are you? Are you the go-getter? Are you the middle? Are you squeaking in right at the end of the day?

Turn to one person around you- tell them which one you'd be and why. ((Wait))

As we're bringing it back together- there is a correct answer here. But, more than that, there is an incorrect answer. We can't all be the go-getters knowing that we'd be right at the front of the work day, perfectly content with our payment, happy to be of help. We can't all be in that group because that isn't how life works. If we constantly see ourselves as the Princess in the story- the one that is “doing it correctly” and is “the good kid,” we will always see the Princess Theology message rather than the message God is trying to hand us. Princess Theology basically is that we are always the Good Ones. Always Israel and never the Philistines, always the Hebrews and never the Egyptians, we're always the ones that God would look well upon... never the oppressors. That just isn't true because we know, we've complained about being last. We've hoarded a few too many rolls of toilet paper. We knew that we hadn't done the same amount of work, and still we got paid the same thing. We have lived into the myth of scarcity and turned against other people to live into it.

For me, I would be one of the middle people. I am not a morning person- ask the kiddos from Montreat. I stumbled out of bed to wake everyone up at 7:50 for 8:00 meet up before breakfast! No one is banking on me being up and at'em early in the morning. But, I am also going to be pretty annoyed if I got paid the same for doing literally hours more work than

someone else. Working in the fields is hard! And I am a justice minded middle child! It is supposed to be Fair!

But Jesus gives us this answer. And I spent a week hearing it over and over again. God gives based on God's generosity. Not based on our worth. **God gives based on God's generosity. Not based on our worth.** That is where the "fairness" comes in. God knows what we've all dealt with. Even what other humans can't see. God keeps things fair by giving grace and love to each of us freely and equally. That is a really important thing to keep in mind. God's grace and love doesn't get to each of us based on who is doing the best job, who is up earliest, who is staying the latest at the office. God gives grace and love completely based on God's own generosity. There are things that humans can't see and understand about other people that God handles all on their own. Some people are in chronic pain and it takes more physical energy to get out of bed in the morning. Some people are dealing with mental illness or family issues that make day to day life absolutely exhausting. Just because someone isn't standing the the go-getter line, doesn't mean they are doing less in life or aren't working as hard. It seems like our society has forgotten that God doesn't give based on our worth or what we perceive human worth to be. God's only concern is God's own generosity, grace, and love.

When the laborers complain in the parable, the land owner says "Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn't I agree to pay you a denarion? Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the same as I give to you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I'm generous?" How many times have we been resentful because God is generous? How many times have we wanted something to work out in our favor because we tried harder, or felt more entitled to payment than someone else. But here's the thing- God doesn't give grace based on our worth. THANK GOD that God doesn't give based on our worth. Instead, God says, "you are more than enough. I love you." and gives grace freely.

Please pray with me.