



# SAINT MARK'S

## EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*A Proper 20, Matthew 20:1-11  
St. Mark's, Little Rock, 9-24-17  
Danny Schieffler*

Almost everyone that I've ever talked with  
about today's parable--

the parable of the workers in the vineyard  
has reacted pretty much the same way.

--It doesn't seem fair.

Someone who goes out early in the morning

And works all through the heat of day

Gets paid the same thing

As the one who doesn't even start work  
until 5p in the afternoon.

It doesn't seem fair.

And indeed the some of the laborers

are resentful

that their pay

did not turn out as expected.

One can imagine that as the 5 o clock workers were getting

a whole day's pay

the early workers  
as they looked on  
must have been anticipated  
3 or 4 days pay.

And yet it did not happen.

Life did not happen as they expected

And these workers resented it

And they began to grumble to their manager.

Here we have borne the heat of the day

And you pay them the same thing as us?

In year's past

I had thought this parable

Was mainly about heaven in the hereafter.

And having three children of my own

I get it that God wants all of God's children

To experience salvation

No matter what hour

They return to God.

Whether it be at noon or the stroke of midnight.

But for some reason this year

I am beginning to think

This parable isn't only about salvation someday

Its about the joy of God's salvation right now

about heaven coming to earth here and now

And even more

This parable is a warning

How resentments

can rob us of that.

Look at the impact of resentment on these workers

They got the job wanted

And they got paid

for a whole day's work

But their resentment

as life unfolded

has kept them from enjoying

what they have.

Right now it seems to me

there's a lot of resentment in our world,

a lot of negativity.

Things do happen in the world

which are not fair.

Sometimes according to our expectations

life itself is not fair.

Sometimes we are disappointed by others

Sometimes we are hurt by others

And sometimes our lives

simply haven't turned out the way we expected.

And the sum of these disappointments

can lead to resentment, anger even bitterness

And these can over the long haul make us suspicious, cynical,  
even depressed.

Henri Nouwen

the late Catholic priest and spiritual writer

says if we search our hearts

We all carry some of this

Some resentment<sup>i</sup>

And I believe he's right especially today

And here's danger

If we let these resentments grow over time

they become something like scar tissue

And rob us of our joy.

And not only rob us of joy

but rob us of our power

to make a difference in the world.

for when we carry resentment in our hearts

there's not nearly as much room for God.

Nouwen talked about this in his own life

And he realized that the first step in moving past resentment

toward a life of gratitude and generosity

Was to confess

his resentments to God.

Because until you name and claim it

You can not let it go.

But when you confess it to God

The space for grace is opened  
God can come in.

And wherever God comes in  
Things are new again.

Behold I make all things new.

And we learn how to sing a new song  
And develop a new spirit of thanksgiving  
In which all of life  
can be received as a gift.”

Years ago,

our sexton at the church in Fort Smith taught me something  
that I have not forgotten  
and that was his attitude of gratitude.

He didn't always have it.

But many mornings I would ask Gordon

Gordon, How are you doing, buddy

And nearly as many mornings his answer was the same.

With a big smile he would say

He woke me up again, Danny

He woke me up again.

Lately I have realized how important this is to me personally

For like anyone else

I am quite capable of developing a bad attitude.

For the systems of world can steal your joy

And I do not believe

That is God's will.

Two little things I have been trying the last few weeks

In addition to what Henri Nouwen suggested

And they have helped.

One is think about the day ahead

in the presence of God

and be quiet for a moment

and then wonder

Who will God put in my path today

What surprises are in store?

How will goodness will break into the world

and how can I be a part of it?

And somehow in a small way

that helps to embrace the unexpected

the interruptions

the challenges

And to remind myself

These may be the very place

Where God breaks in.

And the other thing is to re-record a tape

that has been playing in my head for many years.

And I will confess, I am not there yet,

but some days I can hear a new tape playing.

Instead of hearing the tape that that says

"I have to go do something"

Instead I hear another tape that says

I get to go something.

I get to go to work today

I get to face some challenging situations

I get to see God breaking into the world

and I get to be a part of it.

And this I believe

is what it means for all of us to go into the vineyard

We get to be a part of something

We get to be a part of what God is doing

And we get to make a difference

in a world that definitely needs a difference.

And its doesn't matter whether you've arrived in the vineyard

at 8 in the morning

or 5 in the afternoon

You get to be a part of God's vineyard

You get to take the journey

from resentment to gratitude and generosity

Because you see

He woke us up again.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Nowen, *Spiritual Formation, From Resentment to Gratitude*, Chapter 4.