Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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‘Summon the laborers and give them their pay” (Matthew 20:8).

Jgs 9:6-15; Matt 20:1-16

Preachers will recognize today’s Gospel parable as the “It’s not fair!” story so many congregations react to when a homilist tries to justify the vineyard owner’s decision to pay all his workers the same wage. “It’s not fair!” Why should latecomer and slackers get saved alongside the early risers and full-day laborers?

In its original form, Jesus seems to have deliberately provoked the self-righteous to get them to understand God’s love for sinners. God loves everyone, and it takes nothing away from good people to let God also love sinners. After all, life with God is not owed to anyone; it is a pure gift offered to everyone.

Matthew later applies the original parable to the resentment of Jewish Christians for Gentile converts in his community in Antioch. Mercy, not merit, is God’s will for everyone. Loving each other is a sign we understand divine mercy, limitless and unconditional. Luke’s parable of the Prodigal Son is also an appeal to the righteous “older brother” to accept his scapegrace younger brother who was lost and is found, dead and now alive again. Come to the party. God wants both brothers together at the table.

Jesus’ parables of mercy also rescue the self-righteous from the trap of thinking they do not need God or that they are better than other people because they keep the rules. Keeping the rules is its own reward. Self-righteousness becomes a stumbling

block to real holiness, which is the freedom to love as God loves. Rule-keepers spoil the joy of loving everyone for their own sake, not as a prize for being good.

God is like the parent who loves each child accorgdng to his or her need. The troubled child needs more love and receives it. Those who manage better are loved no less, but they do not need as much attention. Rejoice in that, and do not begrudge God the right to show a preferential love for the poor, the weak and the sinner. Instead, join God in doing the same, and your joy will be complete.

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