

GOD'S RADICAL GENEROSITY

This is a Sermon based on Matthew 20:1-16 by Pastor Ted Rust

A man and his wife were having an argument about who should “brew” the coffee each morning. The wife said, “You should do it because you get up first, and then you don’t have to wait as long to get your coffee.”

The husband said, “**No—you are in charge of the cooking around here so you should do it, because that is your job, and I can just wait for my coffee.**”

The wife replied: “**No—you should do it, and besides, it is in the Bible that the man should do the coffee.**”

The husband replies: “**I can’t believe that is in the Bible. I want you to show me.**” So the wife brought her Bible over and opened the New Testament to the back and showed him at the top of several pages, that it indeed said: “**HEBREWS.**”

Today, my Sermon is **not** based on “**Hebrews,**” but on Matthew 20:1-16. **Jesus tells the Parable of the Vineyard Workers.** He teaches us about “**God’s Radical Generosity.**” Jesus challenges the common assumption that **God should reward people according to what they have earned or deserve. Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of day they began to work.**

Matthew 20:15 is a key verse:

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

The last laborers to join the vineyard had spent their day being picked over. You could say that they were the hiring process “**leftovers.**”

Like the last girl or boy remaining is a gym class selection, these laborers were for one reason or another deemed “less valuable” workers by the other landowners. The Bible does not tell us “why?” Perhaps they were not in the right place at the right time to be hired. Perhaps they were weaker than the other workers. Maybe their strengths and abilities were not easily visible.

Not being hired for work that day is a key part of this parable. These “left-over people” were standing around with no purpose or potential for growth. But in Matthew 20:1-16 we have a **generous landowner who does not overlook anyone. This leader spends his entire day searching and searching for those who have been left behind and not given meaningful work to do. This landowner wants to secure a place for the unemployed in his vineyard. This landowner gives them value and meaning. This is what God’s radical generosity and love is like!**

This is the point of today’s parable: **Jesus will not rest until every lost and idle bystander has a place in the Kingdom of God.**

God’s radical generosity stands in contrast to the popular system that rewards people based on their **merits and outputs.** **But our Lord rewards people of all abilities and work ethics equally. In God’s Kingdom, the left-over workers have as much value as those who were chosen first. Our God is loving and extremely generous!**

The multiple attempts by the employer to find workers mimic what theologian and philosopher John Caputo calls the “**insistence of God.**” **God’s continuing insistence on the well-being of creation** constitutes an invitation for humans to practice hospitality and mutual concern for all persons. God’s call, however, is not coercive – just as the workers in the parable are not violently compelled to enter the vineyard.

When Mary began dating her boyfriend Doug she had a plan. She wanted to **maintain a slim figure and dress very stylishly,** believing she would be more attractive to him in that way. After all, it was what all the women’s magazines and TV commercials advised. It was only much later that she discovered what Doug really thought.

Doug told her this: **“I liked you just as much when you were heavier and didn’t worry about your clothes. I love you just as you are and always will.”**

Mary realized then how subjective “beauty” was. Our thoughts about beauty are so easily influenced by others. We are often focused on the **“external beauty,”** forgetting the value of **“inner beauty.”** **But God sees us in only one way---as his beautiful and precious children.** I believe that when God created the world, he left the best for last—and **that was us.** Everything God created was good says Genesis, but we are extra special because **we are made in the image of God.**

In Matthew chapter 20 Jesus is very clear about the membership rules of his Kingdom. **Entrance is by God’s grace alone.** In the parable of the Vineyard workers, **God is the owner of the estate. Believers are the workers.** This story speaks especially to any of us who “feel superior” for any reason. Just because you have gone to church for a long time or have served on church council or done great works in the congregation does make you “better” or your voice “more important” than someone who walks into worship for the very first time. We all need to remember that,

This parable in Matthew 20 is not about **“rewards.”** It is about **“salvation.”** It is a strong teaching about **grace and God’s radical generosity. We should not begrudge those who turn to God or come to Church in the last moments of life, because, the truth is: “no one deserves eternal life.”**

Many people we don’t expect to see in heaven **will be there!**

Remember the **criminal who repented** as he was dying in Luke 23:40-43? **This criminal who repented will be in heaven along with people who have believed and served God for many years.** Do you resent God’s gracious acceptance of the despised, the outcast, and the sinners who have turned to God for forgiveness? Have you ever been jealous of what God has given to another person? **Well – today’s Gospel would encourage us to focus instead on God’s love and gracious benefits to you. Be thankful for what God has given you.**

One of the central truths of the Holy Scriptures is that God loves you. In fact, God is love. But too many people don’t really understand love. Many people believe that love is a **“feeling”** or an **“emotion.”** Yes, feelings and emotions are sometimes involved in love, but the greatest part of love is **“action oriented.”** Love is a verb more than a noun. Love is **“what you do”** more than just a **“feeling.”**

Many marriages fail because they **overly value “feelings.”** Couples may say that they don’t **“feel the love”** they once did for their mate. They say they **“fell out of love,”** but there is really **no falling out of or falling into love.** **We can fall out of bed or fall in the shower, but typically we “grow” to love someone over time. This love for another person grows from what we see them do for us and others.**

Consider the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Imagine if Jesus, just before the cross, went to the garden and thought: **“I hate this feeling. I don’t feel like dying on a cross, thus I will base my decision upon what I feel.”** Friends—if that would have really happened none of us could receive forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. **The Gospel, however is that Jesus loved God and us. Jesus resisted and fought back his feelings. Jesus prayed 3 times to have the cup removed, but he ultimately obeyed the will of God the Father. Jesus obeyed God’s will---he did not follow his feelings or his fears.**

Here is the point. Love is what a person chooses **“to do”** – not what a person chooses **“to feel.”**

Feelings come and go while real love is objectively displayed in actions.

John 3:16 says:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

God so loved the world and that truth meant “**action**” that included the **supreme sacrifice of his beloved Son Jesus. This is the ultimate example of God’s radical generosity and love. God’s love is active, tangible, and action oriented. Our Christian love should reflect God’s perfect love.** Christian love is a “**choice**” one has to make empowered by the Holy Spirit. Christian love is **not a “feeling”** that comes and goes. Is there any greater love than what Jesus shows us on the cross?

John 15:12-13 says:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

Philippians 4:19 says:

“My God will supply every need of yours.”

James 1:5 says:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him or her ask God who gives generously to all.”

Habakkuk 1:5 says:

“For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn’t believe even if someone told you about it.” God’s radical generosity is all around us. Open your eyes and hearts to see it!

- **One step with God begins a new and very successful journey because of God’s radical generosity.**
- **One hopeful song can change a moment**
- **One compassionate landowner makes the last first!**
- **One generous smile can start a friendship.**
- **One chance is all you need to begin a new season of abundance.**
- **One hug or complement can lift your soul.**
- **One candle can wipe out darkness!**
- **One word can start a prayer that God will answer.**
- **One hope will lift a spirit.**
- **If you serve Jesus this Master will give you joy and meaning like you have never experienced.**
- **One second chance may be all you need.**
- **One Sermon that gives you the truth can set you free.**
- **Generations of people who have declared God’s supernatural power give us inspiration.**
- **God is doing something in your own day – something powerful and especially important for you.**
- **God’s radical generosity is the good news today.**
- **There is one God who will not rest until you and every lost and idle bystander has a place in the Kingdom of God. Amen.**

