There was a line that stands out in this scripture that has kept ringing through my ear all week. Are you envious because I'm generous?

If you are an employer…Do you prefer to pay your employees hourly pay or salary? See you could pay someone hourly and they could take their dear sweet time doing their tasks. I mean you are paying them by the hour. Or rather than paying by the hour, would you rather pay someone by the task? you pay a set amount for a set task and then however long or short it takes is up to the worker? There are benefits to paying someone like this or paying them a salary, because if the task takes someone longer than the a typical work day/week, they still are responsible for the tasks at hand. That only works for certain jobs, because some require you to be present at certain times irregardless.

If you are the employee do you prefer hourly or salary? Salary is guaranteed and consistent week to week. Hourly pay could vary depending on your job and the availability of the work. With hourly pay there is some accountability to pay your for overtime, or you know you will be done at a certain time.

My cousin Alex worked for amazon for awhile and he was really quick at making his deliveries…and always finished early. He would always get asked to help others make their deliveries. He was rewarded with more work.

Do you prefer hourly pay or salary? It kind of depends on the situation though right? There are pros and cons. And I'm guessing that I am not the only one who has worked with others who have vastly different work ethics.

In our transactional society - we can't fathom work without monetary reward as a motivator.

Jesus tells the story of a landowner who hires workers for his vineyard at different times throughout the day. Early in the morning, he hires the first group of workers and agrees to pay them a denarius for the day. Which is considered a days wage. At noon, perhaps on the lunch break he goes back to where the day laborers are gathered and finds more standing there looking for work and hires them. He does this again at 3pm and then at 5pm, promising all the workers a fair wage.

At the end of the day, the landowner instructs his foreman to pay the workers, starting with those hired last. Each group receives a denarius, the same wage promised to the first group. The workers hired first grumble, feeling it is unfair that they received the same pay as those who worked less.

Are you envious because I'm generous?

How many women have worked hard only to discover that their male predecessors or colleagues made more money for equal (or even less) work. It happens ALL THE TIME. I'd be mad too.

It’s also not fair when someone works hard in the fields for 12 hours a day and still can’t afford to take care of their families, and then someone people sit behind a desk for a few hours a day and make way more than their fair share.

Deeply engrained in us is this concept of fairness…it starts young. I mean just try to pass out bowls of ice cream to kids with what looks like slightly different amounts and you will see that this concept of fairness starts early.

What is fair though? Is life fair? Do we always get what we earn? Should we have to earn money to provide for our basic needs? What’s fair? Is it fair that a person is given food stamps so they can eat, even though they don’t work? Is it fair for someone to inherit a bunch of money they didn’t earn? Is it fair for someone to work full time and still not have enough money to make ends meet? Is it fair for a teacher to make way less than a banker?

We talk about fairness all time and try to explain over and over again how it’s not unfair for a 13yo and a 3yo to be treated differently…they need different things, they have different capabilities, they have different privileges. It's fair that we treat them differently.

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There Is a lot we don’t know about the specifics of the workers and why they were hired at different times or worked different lengths of time. But we do know that the workers got what they needed to take care of their families. A denarius is a days wage.

How many of you have noticed and felt the rising grocery prices over the past while? I shop at ingles - sometimes Aldi's but ingles is what was close to my house growing up and is also close to my house now so I sort of gravitate towards there.

Well incase you were wondering…this article that was published by Asheville Watch Dog, reported that Ingles CEO James Lanning, his total compensation increased 55% to 3.3 million in 2023 up from the 2.1 million in 2021. The Board chair Robert Ingle II more than doubled his compensation since 2021 to nearly 8 million in 2023 from 3.7million. Keep in mind this is all happening while we've all been incurring our rising grocery bills.

the CEO pay ratio, widened significantly, to 145 to 1 in 2023 from 100 to 1 in 2021.

Put another way, at the current CEO pay ratio, the average Ingles worker who joins the company as a teen-ager and works until the current Social Security retirement age of 67 will earn as much in their lifetime as Lanning earns in a little over four months.[1]

That kind of greediness gets my blood boiling…

I don't want you to think that this parable is illustrating that God doesn't care about economic justice…because God definitely cares about economic justice, at first glance the parable may seem like its not. But this parable is showing that God cares more about people being given a living wage more than God cares about profits.

[1]

The parable is a critique of these places that could be employing more people and either don't and/or don't pay them a living wage.

As Amy Jill Levein says…

The parable encourages householders to support laborers, all of them. He should continue to put others on the payroll, pay them a living wage (even if they can't put in a full day's work- and so allow them to feed their families while keeping their dignity intact. We have a tendency to make parables only about the next live. But Amy Jill Levin says. Its not just about who gets into heaven, its also about who gets a day's wage. If we look at economics , at the pressing reality that people needs jobs and that others have excess funds, we find what should be a compelling change to any hearer.

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Someone said to me the other day, the problem is the people on welfare, if the government would stop handing out food stamps we'd have people willing to work. (They must not know about my friend - a single mom- a survivor of gender based violence - who WORKS and who STILL needs food stamps to make sure her and her kids are fed). And they must not know about the Ingles CEO - by the way who's pay gap is not near as large as Walmarts CEO and other big grocery chains. If we'd just cut food stamps and stop giving out food then our economy wouldn't be struggling.

I tell you what…It's offensive generosity when people get the food they need to feed themselves and their families….

Can you hear God saying…

Are you envious because I'm generous?

If only we valued businesses based on how well they care for all their employees rather than on their stock value…

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In one church I was a part of, you had your long time members…those who started the church and had been there the whole time, but more recently there had been an influx of new people. And if you've ever been apart of something from the beginning, the ground floor, and then experienced a wave of others coming in and you feel a little resentment, a little like but wait, I've put in my time, and that hasn't earned me anything. I know I have…this parable is also speaking to us….because likely

- The disciples would be thinking of themselves as "first," because they've been in on this from the beginning.

At the beginning of the day they agreed to their wages, and they got that amount. But by the end of the day, the workers expected to be paid more. They are upset because the others were "made equal to them". [2] The upset comes when the comparison comes into play

- "ground floor" disciples, expect a little different reward.

[2] Short Stories by Jesus - Amy Jill-Levine

- Ground floor investors get better dividends, reap higher rewards
- Fans of bands consider themselves “better” fans if they knew them when they were playing in small bars instead of huge arenas
- “Bandwagon” fans are the worst kind in sports.

- And yet Jesus declares - “There are no bandwagon fans in the Kingdom of Heaven.” there is no reward for being on the ‘ground floor.[3]’

And Sometimes the generosity of God is offensive.

“The vineyard owner blows apart our mentality of “deserving.” It is not about what we deserve, or think we deserve, based on what we do or do not put in. The emphasis of the parable is on the generosity of the vineyard owner who pays all laborers what they need to provide for their families, no matter how many hours they have worked.”[4]

Instead of worrying about the unfairness of a God that blesses all, we should rejoice with those that come to join the work, even if they are late arriving.

Which y’all this is really hard…like if I’m honest with all of you, the thought of not being resentful if Donald Trump were to WANT to join the work of the kingdom, the Ingles CEO, Elon Musk, those who’ve made others lives miserable…If I’m honest, this parable shows me the work that God still needs to do on my heart so that I can rejoice with God’s offensive generosity and desire to bless all.

[3] https://www.pulpitfiction.com/narrative-notes/1-32?rq=matthew%2020%221-16
[4] working preacher

Don’t hear me wrong - I’m not saying God is blessing what they are doing now. I’m just saying that it’ll be hard if they change their ways and join the work of the Kingdom and then I see Gods grace applies to them just as much as it does to me. There are still parts of me that expect to be treated differently because I’m trying to work for the kingdom of God, to work for justice and equality…

And so I want to ask all of you…how do you hear or see this parable speaking into our lives today?

Hear the good news…In the kingdom of God you don’t have to earn God’s grace. It’s freely given. To every single one of us. Stop your striving to earn God’s love…and just receive it.