

Homily based on Matthew 20: 1-16

Father David I. Giffen

I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

"It's just not fair!"

Probably the most common phrase my parents heard throughout my childhood and adolescence was: "It's just not fair!" From what I understand, it is a statement that most parents hear from their children almost every day.

"It's not fair that Jimmy next door gets to have an ice cream cone and I don't" – even though I may have had ice cream the night before. "It's not fair that Cousin Suzie gets to go to Canada's Wonderland today" – even though I may have been a dozen times already this year.

How many of you have ever asked why a co-worker should move up the ladder, while you stay behind? Or asked why a neighbour gets to drive the car you want, or live in the house that you desire?

"It's just not fair!"

Jesus tells a story this morning of what sounds to be a pretty unfair situation. He tells a story of a landowner, who seemingly disregards the work of his labourers, by paying those who worked all day, no different than those who barely got to work.

I'm not sure how many of you have ever literally "laboured in a vineyard," as Jesus describes in his parable. I know I haven't, but I did spend a summer working as a furniture mover, and let me tell you, after a sweaty, exhaustion filled day of that, I would have been livid to see an hour's worker get the same pay.

Is it really fair for Jesus to blame the day-long-workers of the vineyard for their discontent? Is it right to expect them to sit idly by, while their work is undervalued and others get the same pay?

Look around us today, in our world, and even in our church, and ask yourself whether any of us would really react any differently? In our capitalist, consumerist, individualistic society, we are taught to begin by asking: how shall I profit, by how much, and how will it make *my* life better?

No wonder they came to yell "death to the radical!" No wonder they wanted Jesus run out of town. For his actions demanded more than they had ever known before – his actions taught them to value others before themselves.

Called to be my brother's keeper, for my humanity is bound in yours.

Earlier this year, I attended a Clergy gathering at a rural church located outside of the city. As the group of fifteen to twenty clergy men and women sat down for our meeting, one cleric noticed some tools that had been left out in the church hall. He lifted a saw from a table and addressed the churches Rector, saying: "What on earth have you folks been doing around here?" Her clever response

showed off her wit as she said, “Oh that, we've just been building the Kingdom of God.”

It reminded me of a quote I heard recently by scholar Amy-Jill Levine, who said, “Jesus tasked his followers with the building of the Kingdom of God, and instead we got the Church.”

Don't get me wrong, I love my Church – in fact, through vows, I have answered the call to devote my life to it. But the church... for all of its good and bad *is not* the Kingdom of God.

I would dare to say, however, that if we listen closely, and if we commit our lives to the gospel, and life of our community to service – it can, should, and will be the springboard, that sees us building the Kingdom that Christ has begun.

Throughout the gospels Jesus says again and again, and again, “The Kingdom of God is like this... The Kingdom of God is like that...” He doesn't ask us to go out and find the Kingdom; he shows us how the Kingdom has already begun to be built amongst us now. He offers us a glimpse into a place where we will see God with the clearest of eyes and the fullest of hearts – and then He calls us to work with Him to build that Kingdom of God.

“The Kingdom is like a landowner who went out to hire labourers for his vineyard.”

For whatever reason, the institutional church in the modern world has lost its focus when it comes to Kingdom building. We have come to spend too many of our Synods and councils discussing inclusion and exclusion, right and wrong, in and out. We spend so much time in these redundant conversations, while the world gets farther from the church, and the church gets farther from the world. We can become so enveloped by our own church culture that the cries of poor, the vulnerable, the alone and the afraid can come to fall upon deaf ears and blind eyes.

But Jesus called us to so much more.

We look around our community of Toronto and we see the effects of rising gas and food prices and families struggling to maintain their bills. We see numbers way up at homeless shelters, and more and more people relying on Food Banks for daily bread.

We look south across the Atlantic and we see a continent struggling to survive. We see massive numbers infected with HIV AID's and no treatment programme in place for the majority of them.

We see churches who have become insular and hidden, with no voice to proclaim the gospel to the world. We see Christians who are afraid use their words to be a voice in the wilderness crying.

We see all of this. We hear all of this. And Jesus says: "It's just not fair!"

The Kingdom of God is place where all persons are created in love – where no one ever begs to survive. The Kingdom of God is a place where we are more than just equal; it is a place where we are God's beloved in Christ. In the midst of our world filled with poverty,

disease, suffering, and despair, Jesus looks at his followers and says quite plainly, "It's just not fair!"

In the eyes of the poor and in the eyes of those in need, God see's the labourers without a place to work. In the eyes of lonely and in the eyes of the afraid, God sees hands to do His work.

He gives no thought to merit or scale; he just brings them into the fold. He treats them no differently than any that may have come before them or any that might come after. His love needs no price, no scale, and no merit – He just steps out of the vineyard and calls them into the Kingdom, saying: "Come and follow me."

Every day, we are each given opportunity to step outside of the vineyard and seek the building of the Kingdom of God. God has equipped us with a voice and a message so that when we proclaim it, others might come to know the Kingdom to which we belong.

We can all remember times when God has offered us more than we deserved, as well as times when we felt we had not been rewarded for our diligent work. But Christ calls us to cast aside terms such as "deserve," "merit," "earn," and "scale" so that God's grace might be the overarching anthem that reigns true.

It is time for us to be a Kingdom people – to live our lives as the united Body of Christ. For we know that in Christ, we have not only been born anew as individuals, but we have been reborn as a greater community of one.

“Deserving” we know we could never be, for we remember the time when God called *us* to work late in the day, and so we proclaim the Gospel of grace, so that no one will ever be left outside, alone, or afraid.

Out of many we *have* been made one, for we are a Kingdom People! For I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper, and my brother's and sister's, you are mine.

Thanks be to God.