

Rev. George Arceneaux

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Pentecost 17

Friends, help me out this morning by not letting the Bishop know this. But there are Sundays where I'm like, you gotta be kidding me Jesus. And don't worry, I'm gonna get to why Jesus is right and basically why I'm a sinner, but! If you're like me, you may have read this thing and been at least a little bit on the side of the bad guy of the story. In the story, we hear of workers who are paid exactly the same no matter how long they worked, some working all day, some working for an hour. And by the end of the story, we hear one of those first comers to the work say to the lord that hired them, "These last workers worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." I looked over the greek to see if there was anything else to this thing the worker says, and NO. The translation we've got here nails it, it was hot as the you know what that day and this guy busted his hump getting the work of the day done. And I don't know about you, but I've done manual labor outside. I did it in the Louisiana heat, roofing in 98 degree weather. And I did it with the laziest, most no-good coworker, this guy lounged in the shade taking half hour smoke breaks while I was ripping up shingles and getting fiberglass in my hand and I'm with the day worker!

Of course... when I get worked up about this, it takes me a little bit of time to say, alright George... maybe Jesus isn't talking about literally working in a vineyard. MAYBE you're missing the point. Maybe there's something to consider about remembering what I need and what others may need; that this isn't a story about just wages but a story about everyone getting a day's wages to live the life they are called to.

The most common reading is that this is a story about conversion and salvation; that it doesn't matter if you are a life-long Christian or a death bed convert, salvation comes to anyone no matter how late in life they come to faith. And I think we could consider that reading... but I find myself wondering more about that question of fairness. I think it's a story about equality, and about grace coming to us when we just need it a little and life is going great and when we might need a break from the world.

Whenever this idea of folks getting what they need, and that what they need may be more than what I'm getting, I get to thinking about one of the best lessons on a healthy marriage, and I think its good advice about any relationship, with friends, family, anybody. And it comes from Chris Rock. Chris Rock is a comedian that hit it big back in the 90s and was in a bunch of movies with folks like Cameron Diaz and Anthony Hopkins, my personal fave being *Osmosis Jones*. But he had a Netflix special come out back in 2018 in which he talked in his comedy routine about his divorce and tried to give some relationship advice.

Rock says, "You think relationships should be equal? There is no equality in a relationship. You are both there to serve. You are in the service industry. You're in a band, and you have roles that you play. Sometimes you're on lead, you get to be the main act and sometimes you're on tambourine. And if you're on tambourine — play it right!"

Rock goes on to say that his marriage ended because he always thought that he was the main act, that he was the star and he wouldn't play the tambourine when it was time for his wife to be center stage. Between a Chris Rock and hard Gospel place (ha ha). I'm reminded that we live in a world where stuff happens. Sometimes your partner ends up out of work, and you have to be there to help. Sometime that person out of work is YOU. Sometimes a person in a relationship gets sick, sometimes life circumstances or choices drive a person into addiction and they need understanding, sometimes you do more work than another person and get paid just as much as them even though they slept in and showed up late.

Sometimes we need to step back and play the tambourine which may be less fulfilling, may be harder work to do, while another person gets to live it up and be the main attraction.

I think Jesus told this story so we don't get hung up on comparing ourselves to others; that we not think we are any more deserving than others of God's grace, or of one another's'. To serve that message, I do wish Jesus added little more to this parable (also please don't suggest to the Bishop that I'd change anything about scripture, I think there's a few bible verses about that). But I think it good to remember that we're not just workers in a vineyard whose fruits will never be appreciated. We're working in a vineyard whose grapes we'll get to taste, which will make the wine for the party we're all invited to. And I'm not just talking about some hereafter pie in the sky where we'll go when we die by and by, I mean if we do the work Christ calls us to of loving others, we make this world, this community, this church better. And we need all the workers we can get, all the folks who are young or are old, who are well-off or who are struggling, who are straight, queer, black, white, weird, traditional, loud, quiet, everything you bring be it great or small. Because we get to make this a place where people feel healed and held, where vulnerability is met with tenderness and where we consider the needs of others as we also ask for help ourselves. No matter when we start the work of loving others, we'll be paid the same. And I promise you it's enough. Amen.