Grace Beyond Measure

9/9/2018
Y. Joe Kim
yhjoekim@gmail.com

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. [2]After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. [3]When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; [4]and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. [5]When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.[6]And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" [7]They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." [8]When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." [9]When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. [10]Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. [11]And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, [12]saying, "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." [13]But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? [14]Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. [15]Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" [16]So the last will be first, and the first will be last.' (Matthew 20:1-16)

1. Hispanic Laborers

While serving a church in Virginia, I had the opportunity to be involved in a ministry called "Good Spoon." Good Spoon was a ministry that fed Hispanic day laborers in Annandale, VA. Many workers would go to a pickup location around 5 or 6 am to get work. Those who were still looking for work until noon, would get hungry. There were fast food restaurants nearby, but most of them did not have enough money to buy food. Several churches in the area began making bag lunches and eventually started cooking lunch every day for these day laborers and continue to do so even to this day.

2. Laborers in the Vineyard

We see these types of laborers in today's scripture. In Matthew chapter 20, Jesus talks about the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The landowner goes to the marketplace to find the laborers at 6 a.m. But for some reason, he keeps on coming back to hire more people at 9 a.m., 12 p.m., 3 p.m. and even

at 5 p.m. Why does the landowner make several runs to the marketplace at the different hours? Is it because he finds out that the work at the vineyard needs more people? Or is it because he has some other reason? We will find out the reason later.

The landowner agrees to pay a denarius to those who would work from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m. for twelve hours. A denarius was the ordinary wage for a day's labor. He does not say the exact amount to those who would work less than 12 hours. The landowner simply says, "***I will pay you whatever is right***" (verse 4).

When it comes time for the landowner to pay the workers, the owner calls his manager to pay them. His manager begins to pay the workers who worked from 5 p.m. The laborers may have expected to get paid 1/12 of a denarius. However, surprisingly they get paid a denarius, a full day's wages. Such a generous payment by the landowner made the other workers think that they would get paid more because they worked much longer. In the end, every worker receives a denarius. When everyone gets paid, some complain because they felt it was not fair to get paid the same thing. But the landowner reminds them that they get paid as he promised and what the workers agreed to.

The landowner asks those who complain, "***Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"*** (20:15) The landowner is the one who can do what he thinks is fair. We see a key aspect of God's kingdom in the parable. In God's kingdom, the important concept is grace, not merit.

The landowner paid the workers by their need, not by their amount of work. The workers needed a day's pay. Even though every worker did not actually work the full day, they needed a full day's wages. Without the full day's wages, the workers would not have enough money to feed their family. They need to pay for their family meals for the following day.

With this in mind, we can understand why the owner continues to hire people throughout the day. It is not because he needs more laborers, but because he knew that the workers need the work to feed their family.

3. Thankfulness of the Workers

Why do you think some got jobs at 5 p.m.? Do you think they showed up late in the afternoon? I do not think so. The workers who get hired in the morning were likely the most capable, young, and strongest. But as time progresses in the day, the older and weaker workers would typically be the ones that would still be looking for work in the afternoon. No one would hire these workers, even at 5 pm. At a time when many of the workers would likely give up getting work, the owner comes back and hires these workers, even just for an hour. These workers would have been so thankful just to have gotten any work.

This is a parable that Jesus uses to explain the kingdom of God. Who are the landowner and the workers? The landowner is God and people are the

laborers. What does the vineyard represent? The vineyard is the kingdom of God. We all come to faith at different times and do different things for God's kingdom. I'm not sure about you, but if you're like me, you may feel like some of the workers who were hired at 5 pm. I often feel like I haven't done much for God's kingdom, yet I receive so much more than I could ever deserve because of God's generosity and his grace. God knows what I need so much more than even I know myself. God's Grace is beyond measure.

How do you think the laborers who only worked for an hour would have felt after receiving a full day's wages? They would have been very grateful, maybe even undeserved. If I were one of them, I would tell the landowner that I would come back the following day and work in the vineyard for free. And the workers would have likely told their families at the dinner table about the miracle they experienced. They would also talk about how gracious the owner is.

4. Blessings Must Be Shared

As we reflect on the year thus far, we are reminded of God's blessings over the past eight months. Our Vacation Bible School was a success. Each Sunday we are able to host visitors. Last Sunday, we had over 100 people worshipping God together. No one is in the hospital. Sunday school gets started today. We have increased our number of Sunday school teachers to five.

We might think that these blessings are because of hard work. But each of these blessings is a gift from God. We may try to work hard, but God's blessings are much greater than our work could ever accomplish. So I am grateful to our Lord for his blessings.

How do we give thanks to the Lord? Do we send a thank-you card? One way is by sharing God's blessings with others. One important aspect of the United Methodist Church is the connectional system. We connect with other churches and the conferences. We come together to merge our efforts when there are others in need.

Within the UMC, our church belongs to the New England Conference. Each church is given something called "mission shares" to help support ministries of the conference and missions throughout the world. Last year I met one of the clergy couples that the UMC supports. They are serving in Almaty, Kazakhstan. They have been in the mission field since 2011 and are able to serve through our support of the mission shares. We actually have a booklet regarding the Apportioned Funds. If you're interested in seeing some of the details, just pick up a copy on the table. If you have any questions, please ask our lay leader Ann Burnham or myself.

This year's our mission shares are about $29,000. So far, our church hasn't contributed at all, but will send about $300 from our offerings in August. And I hope we keep working towards helping to support the mission work both

here in the US and overseas. In 2016, our church contributed $7,000, last year $4,000, and I am hoping to send about $6,000 by the end of this year.

This morning, I would like to ask you to pray about sharing our blessings with New England Conference and the UMC. If you want to share your blessings, please include "Mission Shares" in your offering today or in future weeks. I hope you share not because we are obligated but because we are grateful for God's generosity. And God will give us the joy of giving. Why do we share? It is because we love God so that we give from what God has given us.

5. Two Types of Jesus' Followers

In the Bible, two types of the followers of Jesus are introduced. In Matthew 19:16 and the following, a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks "***Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life***?" Jesus replies, "***If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."*** The man says***, "I have kept all these. What do I still lack***?" Jesus answers, "***If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me***." Do you know what he did after he hears this from Jesus? The Bible says, "***When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions***" (Matthew 19:22). Then Jesus says to his disciples, "***truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven***" (19:23).

In Mark 12:41, Jesus introduces a widow. He says, "***A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny***." Jesus says "***truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more than all those who are contributing to the treasury***" (Mark 12:43). This widow gave all she had to live on. Jesus admires her generous and sacrificial giving. Since she believes that God has given to her generously, she is willing to give everything she has. We don't have to be rich in order to give onto others as well as onto God. When we may be feeling the most lacking, in those moments, we are reminded by God that even giving a small amount of our resources can be pleasing to the Lord.

6. Application

Today, we have a special guest with us, Patricia Dery. Patricia visited us last year and shared about her work. For the past two years, Patricia has been serving the people in the Middle East. Now, she is in Boston helping students to be followers of Jesus. Whether it's in Boston or in the Middle East, Patricia has been working to further God's kingdom. I hope her story gets us excited and activated to see what we can do to help God's kingdom. I pray that some of us can help her ministry. We experience God's generous love in our daily lives. As we share God's blessings with others, many people around us would experience God's grace beyond measure and the love of our Lord Christ Jesus through us. Amen.