

**Our Judgment about What Others Deserve Is Almost Always Less Generous than What God Chooses**

"Today's Gospel lesson, the parable of the workers in the vineyard, is for many the most difficult in all of the New Testament, for it seems to fly in the face of their notions of justice, fairness, and what is morally right," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday. "But I hope that by the time we're done this morning, this text will be one of your favorite New Testament stories.

"This parable is a response by Jesus to Peter (to) a previous question," Pastor Thelander continued. "Just prior to this story, Peter has expressed concern to Jesus that he and the other disciples have left everything in their lives in order to follow him," and Peter and they "want to know if their commitment to Jesus will be rewarded."

In this parable, Pastor Thelander said, "Jesus answers by telling this deliciously frustrating story—a story, he says, that shows us how things are in God's realm.

"The story seems ordinary enough. Early in the day, a landowner hires workers to labor in his vineyard and agrees to pay them the standard daily wage. He returns and hires additional workers at various times during the day, agreeing to pay them what is right.

"We are alerted to something out of the ordinary, however, when the owner of the vineyard hires a group of workers at the eleventh hour, at the end of the work day . . . We are further alerted of something unusual, when evening comes and the landowner reverses the sequence and pays those who worked only an hour first, before moving on to the others. The last are paid first, and the first are paid last. As we might expect, those who had worked all day 'grumbled.' . . .

"In response to their grumbling, the landowner asks two rhetorical questions: Am I not allowed to do what I want with what belongs to me? And, are you envious because I am generous?"

"Notice how these questions echo God's question to Jonah in our Old Testament lesson. God poses the same question to Jonah, who is angry at God because he forgave the people of Nineveh after they repented.

"This parable, and the book of Jonah, confront us this morning with a powerful truth about ourselves which is hard for us to face. That truth is simply this: We are sometimes frustrated, and even angered, at the ways God extends his grace to others.

"As Jesus told this parable, the frustration and anger may have resided with Peter and the others who had tried all their lives to follow the Torah, and now all of a sudden (p. 2→)



God said in the O.T. lesson for Sunday that in Israel they would no longer quote the proverb, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, but their children's mouths pucker at the taste." Instead, God said, his justice will spare the repentant and punish the unrepentant, without regard to their parentage—because, he said, "I don't want you to die." In Ps. 25 we'll hear that God "teaches sinners in his way." The Epistle will tell us that not only does God teach his way to sinners, but also he gives us "the desire to obey him and the power to do" so. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus says promises to obey don't cut it, and only an actual turning from disobedience will allow the repentant one entry into the Kingdom of God, regardless of one's past. Photo credit: [bp2.blogger.com](http://bp2.blogger.com)

**Sermon (cont'd)** the Gentiles are invited to the party.

"For us, our hang-ups about God's grace are as individual as we are. The bottom line: the logic of God's grace often escapes us. Our judgment about what others deserve is almost always less generous than what God chooses. That's why when we read this parable the hairs on the back of our neck rise up, and we are left stammering, 'This is not fair.'

"But this parable is not about fairness. It's about the character of God. This story is not about funny math. It's about the nature of the employer. The reign of God is full of surprises. And guess what! The outpouring of God's saving grace on human beings is God's prerogative, and is not ours to predict or control."

Pastor Thelander quoted New Testament commentator Sally Brown as saying that if we identify with the ones hired at dawn, then we complain that God is "unfairly" merciful—but if we identify with the latecomers, then we thank God that he is "unfairly" merciful. "Whether nurtured into the faith . . . or called to faith late, we are all the beneficiaries of this utterly sufficient grace."

"As we prepare to come to the Table of the Lord this morning," Pastor Thelander said, "we do so with the awareness that the ways in which God pours out his grace is almost scandalous—to which I, and I hope all of you, say, 'Thank you, Jesus!'"

**The Components of a Thelander Sermon**

Pastor Thelander was asked in a post-service discussion to describe his sermon-composition process. He said his method is one taught by Dr. Paul Scott Wilson at the University of Toronto: "**Page 1: Trouble in the Text**" (explores human sin and weakness in the biblical text); "**Page 2: Trouble in our Lives**" (explores, by analogy, human sin and weakness in our lives); "**Page 3: Grace in the Text**" (explores where and how God is acting in the text to bring healing, forgiveness, restoration, etc.); "**Page 4: Grace in our Lives**" (explores where and how God is at work graciously empowering us in the present). "Part of the appeal in the method to me is what I consider to be a Wesleyan dynamic, namely, the belief that what God commands, God empowers. So the focus of the sermon is always on 'page 3' and the gracious action of God. This leads, hopefully, to the preacher seeking to explore by analogy how God is already at work in the lives of the people to bring about the things God desires. Any sermon imperatives are then firmly grounded in the biblical indicatives of God's prior and gracious action."

**Editor:** Box 972, Boise, ID 83701.

208-336-3951, [harbinger@aol.com](mailto:harbinger@aol.com)

**Pastor:** The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander,

[epworthrector@msn.com](mailto:epworthrector@msn.com)

**Web:** [www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org](http://www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org)

Sundays, 9:00 a.m.: Chesterton discussion series

Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table Service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Evening Prayers

**For the Poor:** Meat, fresh produce; canned fruits and vegetables; dairy products; peanut butter; cooking oil; pancake mix; syrup; spices; diapers; baby wipes; bathroom tissue; for personal care: soap, shampoo, conditioner, razors, shaving cream; new underwear (adults and children); cleaning supplies; bleach.

**Readings, 9/28:** Ezek. 18:1-4, 25-32; Ps. 25:1-14;

Phil. 2:1-13; Mt. 21:28-32. **10/5, 10 a.m.:** Is. 5:1-7;

Ps. 80:7-14; Phil. 3:14-21; Mt. 21:33-43. **10/5, 6:00**

**p.m.:** Ps. 145; Hosea 13:4-14; 1 Cor. 2:6-16.

**Prayer Emphases:** Sri Lanka; United Church of Christ; St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Church, Palo Alto, CA, and Fr. George Aranha; Christian retreat centers, including Nazareth in Boise; parishioners on Winstead Place.

**Chesterton's Orthodoxy:**

Sunday's 9 a.m. discussion:

"Freedom to Think", based

on chapter 3, "The Suicide

of Thought". For discus-

sion questions, chapter

text, and notes, visit the

Website.

