

**“Getting our Story straight”
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday September 24, 2023**

Matthew 20:1-16

This morning we are learning from Matthew what God is like, and what God’s kingdom’s is like. You may notice that Luke’s gospel talks about the kingdom of God, and Matthew gospel talks about the kingdom of heaven. They are the same.

Matthew being a from a Jewish background is not going to use the name of God when describing the kingdom, but rather describes it in terms of where God’s rule is – in the heavens which are all around us.

So, the kingdom of God is like an estate manager who hired people to work in his vineyard. Work is good. Work is a good gift from God, working in God’s vineyard is a joy. Day labourers, those hired, would have food to eat for themselves and to provide for their families because they worked.

You’ll notice that the owner of the vineyard doesn’t look at the harvest and decide he needs more workers. He goes to the market square repeatedly seeing if there are people who need to work. This is not your typical estate owner.

And of course, it doesn’t take much imagination to guess who’s in the marketplace looking for work as the day wears on.

It’s the people who slept in, who aren’t all that organized, or the people who were out carousing the night before, or the people who really don’t want to work too hard, or it’s the slower ones, the lame, the weaker, those who are struggling for whatever reason. There’s a reason they are still standing around in the marketplace ‘til noon in the day.

But it seems that the estate owner isn't choosy about who is hired. It seems that any who are willing to come to his vineyard and work are welcome, and the promise is to pay them fairly.

And then comes the twist in the kingdom.

Some of the last are paid first, and they receive a whole day's wage. They are not deserving of it. The kingdom of God is a generous place, or is it?

Those who were hired first thought they would receive something more, something greater. They had borne the burden of the day; they worked a full day... shouldn't they receive more?

They received what was promised them. How is that fair? Is the kingdom of God an unfair place? Yes. I believe it is.

It's like an orphan child growing up on the streets, barely surviving, being taken in and adopted by a wealthy businessman and woman. The couple taught the child the business, trained him so he gained skills, sent him to school, took care of the boy.

Years later the family adopted another child, from very much the same situation, living on the streets, barely surviving, and again the couple took her in and took care of her, sent her to school, taught her the business.

Then the wealthy man and his wife died and split his estate between the two children. Can you imagine the first child being upset because the newer family member received the same as him? Wouldn't you want to remind the foolish young man that all he had was a gift from his adopted family, and he owed them nothing but gratitude?

When we forget our story, then we can wrongly judge God, and think wrongly about God's kingdom, and who God is.

How is it that we have breath in our lungs?

How is it that we have gifts and mental capacity?

Who has invited us to be creators and rule along side of God, as part of our calling?

Who has given us health and strength for today?

Who has given us this day?

Who has given us family and friends, mentors, and teachers, people who have cared for us, people who have taught and challenged us?

Who has given us good work, and blessed us along the way?

We are like the children off the street, adopted into a family, cared for and loved by our Father, who generously gives us an inheritance.

It's a funny thing about us that we aren't always happy with good things in our lives, if those things aren't better than someone else.

I think of that question people were asked about would they rather earn \$50,000 and everyone else earn \$25,000, or earn \$100,000 and everyone else earn \$200,000, assuming everything else was the same.

50% of people wanted to earn less but earn more than everyone else.

Well, those folks are going to be surprised in the kingdom of God.

Because God is generous, to everyone, everyone of us receives gift after gift, and in Jesus we receive life that is eternal.

The kingdom of God isn't fair in the sense that we mean, where we earn our way in, and are rewarded for all the good we do for God. But it is fair in the sense that none of us have earned our way in, it is grace from beginning to end.

Our story, the story of our church is about God's grace, God's gift.

I was once lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.

When we tell the story of Calvin, I hope that it will begin and end with God. God called people together, God gifted them, God equipped them, God gave them a passion for the gospel.

God provided, and with God's help these wonderful saints accomplished great things for the kingdom of God.

Our story is about God's faithfulness, God's graciousness, God's loving kindness that is new to us every morning.

And since it is God who built this church, God who called, God who has been faithful, and we know that we are God's hands today, as we were in God's hands yesterday, and 98 years ago.

And so there is great hope, and a great future, as we serve our great God together.

Thanks be to God!