

Last week, Jesus told a parable about a worker who owed the king a lot of money. His debt was forgiven. Then he turned around and called in the debt of another. Those around him observed this took this info back to the king, who threw the man in jail. The story was about forgiving a debt. It was also about the generosity of spirit that can be shown. That lesson continues today.

We've got Jesus telling another story, this time about a landowner who went to the market to get some folks to work in his field. He goes first thing in the morning and makes a deal with the workers. He'll pay them a certain amount for their work. He goes back and gets more workers and tells them he'll pay them 'what is right'. He goes again and again and continues to make that same offer. At the end of the day, all the workers are paid the same.

The ones who have been there the longest start grousing. They believe they should have been paid more. The landowner (who represents God) says it's up to him how much he gives each person. Then, he goes further. If you've got Young's Literal Translation, your Bible may actually point out the appropriateness of your perspective. It does this through a curious idiomatic expression about having an evil eye. In Matthew 20:15, the landowner says, 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your *eye evil* because I am generous?' **Lois Tverberg, Director of the En-Gedi Resource Center unpacks this expression. She says,** "...Jesus may have been using a Hebraic idiom that contrasts a "good eye" (*ayin tovah*) and a "bad eye" or "evil eye" (*ayin rah*). The Hebraic understanding of "seeing" goes beyond taking in visual information in the eyes — it refers to one's outlook on life and attitude toward others. It can even mean to respond according to a need that is seen. For example, the phrase "Jehovah Jireh" is often translated "God will provide," but it means, literally, "God will see." The idea is that God responds to needs that God sees.

From this came the notion that a person with a good eye is generous, seeing and responding to the needs of others. Someone with a bad or evil eye was thought to greedily have only self-interest at heart."

1.http://www.egrc.net/articles/director/articles_director_1203.html

Another part of today's lesson is not judge your lot in life by comparing it to what others receive. Stay in your own lane. Can you imagine how dangerous it would be if we tried to drive our cars and all the cars around us at the same time? Or if we're at the Y swimming in our lane and comparing ourselves against all the other swimmers in the pool? The griping workers in our passage today had nothing to complain about. It wasn't their business how much the other workers made. Yet, they were envious of the others' good fortune. In keeping with the color of the day (St. Patrick's Day), we can think about that green-eyed monster: Jealousy personified. They were jealous. They coveted what their co-workers' had. God warned against that in Exodus. Remember, 'you shall not covet?' It's Commandment number 10.

I remember my father once remarking on the disparity in our salaries. I was just a year and a half out of college and working at my second job. And I was making 7k more than he was...as a 25-year, tenured college professor. We were in our own lanes. He didn't begrudge me my good fortune.

Jealousy can surely be a monster keeping us from being happy for another's success. In an article in Psychology Today, professor Solomon Schimmel from Hebrew College invites us to quiet our envy by thinking of what we have that our friend doesn't have. He further says we ought to consider the cost of that friend's path to success and also to remember that not only can envy not give you what you're missing, but to remember that envy hurts.2 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/open-gently/201301/when-you-can't-be-happy-friend>

God's grace isn't for us to judge. Nor is it for us to compare. *Remember, our version of 'fair' is often skewed toward our own self-interest.*

The landowner asks the early workers, "didn't I pay you what I said I would? They respond affirmatively. (So what's the issue?)

The issue is that they felt that they were slighted by the manner in which the landowner treated the others. They were comparing themselves and quite literally their worth against others who worked for less time. *Their notion of fair was skewed by self-interest.*

Jesus points out the obvious: it's the landowner's money and he can do what he wants with it. If we're to understand that the landowner is God, then **we see the currency given as God's grace**. God treats all of the workers the same. Yes, some have labored longer. God sees more than that.

I can't help but wonder why all those workers were still there at the marketplace waiting for work. Did the strongest ones get picked first? The tallest? The most connected? If you remember playing dodgeball as a kid, when teams were picked you had to stand up against the fence. In my experience, the boys were usually picked first, then the fastest, the slimmest and the most popular. The poor overweight child who already had plenty of issues (which is why they were overweight) had the 'you're not wanted' reinforced in the order of the draw.

I was in Santa Barbara California the first time I saw a line of day laborers waiting for work. Apparently, you could hire them for projects and pay them whatever you wanted. According to a study done a dozen years ago by the Public Policy Institute of California, day laborers "work only an average of 23 hours per week. This is not for lack of trying. On average, day laborers look for work five days a week but find it on only two or three days."³ <https://www.ppic.org/press-release/day-laborers-in-california-much-ado-about-how-much/>

Was that the case in Biblical times too? Why were all those people wanting work still at the market at noon, three, and five (actual times)? Were they older? Were they sick? Were they slow? Was there something about them that made others uncomfortable?

Whatever it was, they still 'put themselves out there'. And God saw them. God invited them to his field. And God paid them as much as he paid the others. In a sense, based solely on their time worked, some of them made double what the others made. Some triple, and some even more

You may have heard it said, "Be kind. "Be Kind. Everyone you see is fighting a battle you know nothing about." You don't have to know--because God does. Life isn't fair. But, lucky for us, neither is God's grace. God isn't keeping track of who has been a Christian the longest. Or who has done good works the longest. If you are invited and you show up, God will give you what is right. Thanks be to God! Blessed be and amen.