

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time Matthew 20:1-16

A hard-working parish priest, after a lifetime of ministry, died and went to heaven. When he got there he was assigned an attractive two bedroom house to serve as his heavenly abode. He was rather pleased with his house until he took a walk around the neighborhood and ran into a parishioner who had been a cab driver and now was living in a mansion with a swimming pool and tennis courts. The priest went directly to St. Peter to complain. He said, "I've worked my whole life long serving God's people. Now this parishioner of mine is a very good person, but he was a cab driver! Why is he living in so much bigger a house than I am?" St. Peter said, "Here's how it goes. When you preached, people slept. But when he drove, people prayed."

The trouble with being a Christian is that we imagine God thinks as we think. We imagine that God values what we value and that God is not concerned about things that are of no concern to us.

The prophet, Isaiah, in today's first reading, tries to correct this misapprehension. In that reading God says, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my thoughts above your thoughts."

God does not think as we think. God's values and our values are not the same. We care and love the people in our own family and those who are close to us. God cares for those people as well. But God also cares for **every** family, regardless of race, religion, or economic worth.

We care for and love our country, striving to make it just and free. God loves our country as well, and I trust blesses it and guides it. But God also loves every other country and all the citizens in it and desires that all people would share the freedom and prosperity that all too often we take for granted.

We love those who treat us well, who stand by us, and offer us respect. God loves those people too. But God also loves our enemies, those who have hurt us. For as wrong or misguided as they may be, they are still God's children.

To put this bluntly, God loves everyone as much as God loves us. This is the beautiful and disturbing truth that we find in today's gospel parable.

When the landowner goes out to the marketplace late in the day, who does he find standing there? All the workers that no one else would hire. These would be the weakest workers, the oldest workers, the workers with minimal skills. But the landowner not only hires them but gives them a wage equal to everyone else.

The landowner acts this way because he represents God who loves all people equally, the weak as well as the strong, the old as well as the young, the last as well as the first.

God loves everyone as much as God loves us. But this is a truth that does not sit easily with us, because we can point to all kinds of things that we think should make God love us more.

We go to church every weekend. We are people who are faithful to our spouse. We don't abuse alcohol or drugs. We follow our country's laws. We have never been arrested.

We are the ones who have been hired first, and we understand their complaint in the parable. We have worked all day long and God has raised others who have worked much less to be equal with us. It's not right. And it is not, in the way that we think.

But God thinks differently. And like those who are hired first in the parable, we have to make our peace with that.

But here is the good news: As soon as we accept that truth of how God loves, a durable hope emerges for us, because equal goes both ways. When we recognize that God loves everyone as much as God loves us, it invariably follows that God will never love us less than any other person.

AMEN.