



18 PENTECOST

A05 (PROPER 20)

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

18 September 2005

Pastor Kevin Maly

Jonah 3.10-4.11

St. Matthew 20.1-16

“So . . . you really want to know what the realm of God is like? Well,” said Jesus, “it’s like the owner of a fabulous vineyard who early one morning drives by one of those day labor places you see all around town. The reliable laborers, the truly hard-working ones, are there waiting for work even before the sun is up, eager to do whatever job comes their way. ‘Twenty dollars an hour I’ll pay you,’ says the owner of the vineyard, ‘two- hundred-forty dollars for 12 hours in the fields.’ The vineyard owner has no trouble filling the van with workers and once they get to the vineyard they’re off picking grapes as fast as they can.

“A little while later, the vintner drives back in to town, goes by the day-labor place, sees some stragglers, tells them come to work in the vineyard and they’ll get paid whatever’s right. Wow! Such a deal—they got to sleep in and they still end up working! Another couple hours later, close to noon now, the vintner again goes by the day labor place and sees yet some people looking for work. This group, however, is definitely a few steps down from the first two van loads of grape pickers. These ones are sort of a sluggish variety, and none of them looks too ambitious. But the owner of the vineyard says, ‘Come work, and I’ll pay you what’s right.’ And off they go. Same thing happens at three o’clock. This mid-afternoon group, however, is definitely on the sketchy side—several are clearly hung-over and a couple of the women and at least one of the young men obviously worked East Colfax most of the previous night.

“Then five o’clock rolls around—close to quitting time, but once more the owner of the vineyard goes out—sees yet some more people standing around the day-labor place. Come work for an hour says the vintner and I’ll pay you what’s right.

“Now this last bunch is a group of dim bulbs if there ever was one. One tweaked-out individual has purple hair and piercings just about everywhere, tattoos by the dozens, and is wearing platform shoes completely unsuitable for anything except standing around and posing. Another individual, obviously in need of a drink, figures, what the hell, an hour’s wages might buy enough Thunderbird to get by on for at least the next couple days. The rest of the group go rapidly down hill from there. But they all get into the van and arrive at the vineyard just in nick of time—to put in something somewhat shy of five minutes’ work— which is a good thing since it’s apparent that this last bunch is really not into whole word scene. Purple-hair-with-platform-shoes staggers around looking for firm ground while smoking something that smells vaguely like manure; another “worker” is having a totally random conversation with himself about interplanetary travel and having just arrived from some galaxy far, far away. And the one Jonesing for Thunderbird has the shakes and is obviously about to hurl on the vineyard owner’s brand new boots.

“None too soon the end-of-shift whistle blows and everyone lines up to get paid – and the last group, mainly because they haven’t really budged from the parking lot, are first in line. Purple-hair and Thunderbird, in a rare show of energy, are the first to tear open their pay envelopes: twelve crisp twenty-dollar bills!! Wow!!!!

But, surely—surely(!) there's been some ridiculous and insane mix-up. But so it goes for everyone in line—those who worked their hearts out for twelve hours, those who worked for nine hours, those who rather ineptly worked for six hours, and those who bumbled about for three hours—slowly and with hangovers—*everybody* gets the same pay. Gypsies, tramps, and thieves—along with those imbued with the work ethic to the very marrow of their bones—all of them treated . . . *alike*—all of them treated *most royally*.

“Well, you know exactly who isn't happy—and they waste no time loudly telling the owner of the vineyard how completely *cocked up* this whole business is—in fact, they tell the owner, this is no way whatsoever to run a business. Who's your accountant?!?—they scream. The owner of the vineyard is used to this by now and does a little roll of the eyes and says, ‘Oy *gewalt*, such a *tsimmes!* Listen, I died to all of that business accounting stuff a couple thousand years ago. Besides, what's it to you? It's my vineyard and I get to do what I want—so quit *kvetching*, take your *gelt*, and go get yourselves some dinner at my restaurant.’

“And so the laborers—and the non-laborers—went off to dinner . . . Purple Hair lurching along in platform shoes; Mr. Inter-planetary traveler muttering to himself about finally arriving in a decent solar system; the East Colfax whores and hustlers looking somewhat stunned over their trickless good fortune; and Thunderbird, hungering for some decent, not-out-of-the-dumpster food for a change and thirsting after something truly refreshing . . . the whole thoroughly odd *mish-mash*, all together tiredly slouching toward some restaurant called *The House of Bread*. Of course, the laborers of the first hour still looked like they could just *plotz* over the whole situation and they did seem to be wondering if there was a country somewhere they could invade—but they would get over it as soon as someone hosed 'em down with some cool water and stuck a menu in their hands.

“However, the strangest things started happening during the meal. This unlikely bunch of fellow diners found themselves getting a little . . . well, a little over-generous. And not just with their money—‘though certainly that too. They started spreading it around like there was no end to the twenty-dollar bills in their envelopes—but now that you mention it, it did seem like the number of bills in everyone's envelopes stayed pretty much the same no matter how much they spent. But there was another sort of extravagance going on – the age-old enmity between the workers of the first hour and those of the third, sixth, ninth hours, and of the last five minutes—that age-old enmity seemed to dying away. Fact is, there was a whole lot being put to death right *and* left, and to the infinite shock of everyone, whole new selves were being born. Purple-hair-with-platform-shoes and the early morning worker-bees were toasting one another's good fortune and having a regular love feast. Thunderbird seemed . . . free. . . free for the very first time ever. The women and young men of Colfax Avenue were being treated with dignity and respect, and their faces shone like the sun. And everyone agreed that Mr. Interplanetary Traveler was the very best storyteller they had ever heard. Of course to the rest of the world the whole thing from beginning to end was absolutely crazy, insane, and all *cocked up*. The owner of the vineyard merely smiled; it was good, it was very good, it was god-blessed, gotcha-but-good good. And tomorrow would be yet another day with a whole new crew of “workers” to be brought in.

“And that,” said Jesus, “is what the realm of God is like. And mark my words, it shall be so, this very day . . . here on earth . . . among you . . . as it is already in heaven.”