

**TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (9/20-21/2008)**

*Isaiah 55/6-9, Psalm 145, Philippians 1/20-27, Matthew 20/1-16*

Today's parable can easily irritate honest, hard-working people.

It seems so unfair, and yet Jesus uses it to flesh out the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It's all about a land-owner who, to work his vineyard, hires men at various hours of the day.

Those who start early in the morning with a promise of a full and just day's wages assume that they will make more than those hired at the last minute.

It's a reasonable assumption, but that's not how it works out.

All the workers receive the same wages, and when confronted by the angry early workers, the owner doesn't back down: "*Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money?*"

How could this parable possibly tell us anything about the action of God in our world?

First off, keep in mind the words of the prophet Isaiah today: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.*"

God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus was the personification of that truth, and that truth is sometimes hard for us to grasp.

We have standards by which we live, and, most of the time, we are possessive about those standards.

We claim we believe in fair play.

A man or woman gets what's coming to him or her.

That can go both ways, as you know.

It means that, if we work for something, we have a right to expect something.

And if we don't work for what we want, then we have no right to expect anything.

Oddly enough, today's parable brings to mind the story of the *Prodigal Son* in *Luke 15/11-32*.

The younger son, who blew his inheritance on fast living, is like the workers who arrived late on the scene and got paid a full day's wages.

He was the recipient of extraordinary understanding and forgiveness from his father.

The brother, the loyal son who stayed home and led a dutiful if not happy life, is like the workers who were employed for the full day and received a full-day's wages.

Each brother has his own expectations. Each will know surprise.

The father and the vineyard owner are obviously alike in the stories.

They dispense mercy far beyond the call of duty.

The implication may be that in God's Kingdom, God is never unjust, but sometimes His mercy is so great that the justice of His actions can get lost in the shuffle.

The truth is, we can measure neither the justice nor the mercy of God.

God's actions are infinitely wise, but our perceptions of divine justice and mercy are finite.

Look at it this way: If you identify with the late-comers into the vineyard or the prodigal son, you are blessed by a benevolent and merciful God.

If you identify with the faithful workers and the older son, you are even more blessed and precious to this incredibly loving God.

Either way, you can't lose!