

WEEKLY SERMON

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The labourers in the vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

Twenty-five years ago, I got a pay rise of 10p an hour ... I wasn't thrilled by it. I now know that my feelings were very selfish and petty but I felt I deserved more.

Working as a supervisor I regularly looked after staff who earned less than me. They had got a pay rise of 80p an hour and I was incandescent that they were receiving eight times the rise.

My colleagues had only received 80p because the National Minimum Wage had been brought in, meaning that every worker over the age of 21 had to earn at least £3.60 an hour. I should have been happy that those less well-off than me had been given a bit of a boost. I wasn't. I felt like I had been cheated.

Jesus recounts a parable in Sunday's gospel of some labourers who are hired at different times throughout the day. Some toiled from the crack of dawn; others from 9am; still others from noon; a handful from three in the afternoon; several from five and the remainder start work sometime later. When the day ended, they received their wages and were all shocked to receive the same amount.

I imagine if I had been one of those who started working at the crack of dawn, and carried on through the whole day, I would feel a bit miffed to receive the same as someone who had only joined in for the last little bit. They should receive payment relative to the amount of work we have done, shouldn't they? Isn't that how the labour market works?

Jesus' parable is of course not about the labour market, but about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is challenging his disciples, the ones he was closest with, to realise that there is a radical equality when it comes to God's love and grace. We cannot earn this grace by how hard we work or for how long, but because God chooses give it freely and generously.

It will be humbling for us all to accept that there will be others who will be considered brothers and sisters, who are not like us. Indeed, they may be people who stand for things that we vehemently oppose, yet the sight of these heavenly siblings should fill us with hope, reminding us that none of us 'deserve' God's love and forgiveness; it is a grace freely and generously given.

Rev Calum Crombie, Managing HMP Chaplain

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