

Sermon Response Guide: November 19, 2023
Matthew 20:1-16, "Toxic Envy" — Pastor Adria Willett-Leonardo

Overview:

Hiring workers for the day was a common situation in Jesus' day, and it was common for landowners to pay the hired workers at the end of each day. There are two things that are different than the norm in these parables. First, the repeated hirings. It was unusual that the vineyard owner had to go back to the market three times to gather up more laborers. Normally the landowner would have gotten all the workers he needed the first time he went to the market. But in telling it like this—with repeated trips to hire people—is most likely Jesus' way of setting up the other unusual part of the story. Irregardless of how long the laborers worked in the vineyard, the owner paid them the same amount at the end of the day.

The workers are given equal pay for unequal work. And as we would expect, some of the workers hired first complain about this. The owner's question at the end points to the point of the parable: "Are you envious because I am generous?" (NIV) Or in the New Living Translation, "Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?"

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 instructed the Israelites in how to treat their employees: "Never take advantage of poor and destitute laborers, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your towns. You must pay them their wages each day before sunset because they are poor and are counting on it. If you don't, they might cry out to the Lord against you, and it would be counted against you as sin." (NLT) The workers hired at the end of the day reported that no one had hired them. Perhaps the vineyard owner saw their need and had compassion on them; he paid them a full day's wage so that they would have money to provide for their families too.

Jesus told this story to show us that God's standard of justice is based on his own character: his grace, unfailing love, and compassion. *How God determines what is right and just is based on love, not math.*

In their envy and comparison, the earlier workers were blind to the goodness of the vineyard owner and to the needs of the other workers. Do we sometimes lose sight of the goodness of God toward us? How often do we get jealous when others receive good things?

Comparing ourselves to others can lead down dangerous paths, perhaps even leading us to worship God's good gifts instead of God. We may not be able to experience God's goodness when we are focused on ourselves and what we want. In addition, it will be difficult to become the generous people he wants us to be until we give up any sense of entitlement.

One of the ways we can avoid envy and comparison is to make gratitude a regular habit. Gratitude helps build the muscle of trust. This week may we be thankful for all God's gifts and seek to imitate his goodness in our lives.

Discussion:

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon?
2. Name some of the ways that God been generous to you.
3. How might envy or comparison negatively affect our walk with God?
4. What are some ways to show God gratitude? How could you make gratitude a regular habit?