



September 20

THE NEW SHOFAR

God's ways are not our ways! Alleluia!

Serving God brings with it rewards of its own

Why bother with discipleship? Because it is good for the whole world!

In Matthew's reading Jesus addresses Peter's very human question: what way is it worth our while to take up all of the hard work needed to live out the promises we made at our baptism? In what ways does discipleship enhance and enrich our lives as men and women in creation? The parable itself is a parable about a landowner who employs workers in his vineyard but in the Old Testament the vineyard was a metaphor for Israel. It is thus directing us to read this in terms of Jesus (*landowner*) preparing for the harvest in the Kingdom of God (*the vineyard*). The workers in the Kingdom are the disciples.

- The owner goes out at the normal time – **dawn** - he then employs the first lot of men, agreeing with them an amount one denarius for a full day's work.
- He then goes out later in the morning, around **9am**. He finds men still in the market-place and employs these for his garden.
- As he goes back time and again to employ extra workers, the quality of the workers will decline, the best ones having been snapped up by other landowners at the dawn selection.

The harvest must have been upon them and the work-load enormous. We know this because he goes back to the market-place at around **midday** and then later again in the afternoon at about **3pm**. He finds men still there who admit that *no one would hire us to work*. These men clearly did not have a great deal going for them, but they were taken up by the landowner and put to work.

Then, for some strange reason, the man goes back towards the end of the working day, at **5pm** (work finishes at 6pm) and finds still more unemployed workers and takes them to his farm. This is a significant point in the parable, and those hearing it would have been taken aback and wondered about his sanity.

The ways of God are, fortunately, not the ways of the world

Then, when the day's work is done, the owner has his manager pay the men their wages. He begins with the last employed and works his way up to the men who were employed first, those who had worked a full day in the hot sun. This is meant to build up the tension in the story. We all wait to see how much more the first employed will earn.

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When the men were paid a denarius for doing no work those who had been there since dawn must have anticipated a much bigger payment. However, they received the amount to which they had agreed – one denarius. Where is the justice in that?

When they grumbled about this, the employer, ever so gently, reminded them that it was not that he had been unfair or unjust to them. They had been paid in full. The reality was that *he* had chosen to be more than generous to those who had come later. He was that kind of landowner. As he was the master of the garden and the money was his, he could pay according to his own will. The last verse picks up the comments from 19:23 and presents the answer of Jesus to Peter: *God will judge according to His own divine perspective.*

There is no reason why the owner of the vineyard would go out at 5pm to employ that last group of workers. On every level it is a ridiculous thing to be doing. The men he would find there would have been the unemployable dregs of the village, the old men, the sick, the physically disabled, the drunks, the men who had been passed over by all of the other landowners. In the eyes of the world they are not worth employing.

There was little point in bringing them out to the farm at dawn as they would have been incapable of doing a full day's work. They were slackers, drunks and dregs who really did not want to work. There was even less point in taking them late in the day. As most farms were outside of the village, by the time they made their way to where the vines were, there would be no time left for them do any work, let alone paid work.

God never repays His disciples for the work that they have done. Serving God has its own rewards built in. Any life blessings we have, come about through God's great generosity, compassion and love. God desires rewards for these men, unworthy though they are. Jesus went back to the market-place, not because He wanted work done. He was after the workers. God loves all of his children equally and repays them generously. Not for their work but for who they are – men and women for whom Jesus died on the cross.

Those first workers had nothing about which they could complain. A denarius for a day's work was considered to be the standard rate of pay. It was just and a rate to which they had agreed – just as we agreed to the demands of discipleship offered to us at our baptisms. Fortunately, God does not reward us according to what we deserve, according to what we earn during a lifetime.

God sees us through the lens of Jesus his Son. Jesus values us so much that He was willing to lay down His life on the cross – for our sakes. We are precious to God not only because we are made in the divine image and likeness but because Jesus too shared our humanity and died for us. Died as one of us.

This is why Jesus comes *out to us*. He invite us into his Kingdom (vineyard), even when others reject us and despise us. Even when we would prefer to laze around in the “village”. We are loved and rewarded out of the bounteousness of God.

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