

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

It finally was the day I had always dreamed about, well since my pre-teen years anyway. It was the day I was going to finally get my very own car. My dad and I had talked about an appropriate price point for a sixteen-year-old. I had made him my list of wants. It was pretty simple. I wanted any color but white. I wanted a two door sporty car. I wanted everything inside to be automatic. And most importantly I wanted a cd player, you know they were brand new and hot on the market when I turned sixteen. My dad and I went over and over the list. We had been looking at different models and types of cars. I felt confident dad knew exactly what I wanted. And today, while I was working my part time job as a cashier in the pharmacy, which was part of our agreement for me to get a car, he and my pap who happened to be visiting from Pennsylvania were going out to buy my car.

That particular day I worked a 4pm-9pm shift. Around 7:00 my dad came in and handed me my key. He said do you have time to go out and take a quick look at your new car? My supervisor gave me permission and I all but ran outside. When we entered the parking lot I followed my dad very impatiently. And when he stopped in front of a car he said, "What do you think?" I replied, "Of what?" He pointed to the car in front of him. I said, "That can't be my car! It's not what we talked about!" He said, "Well this is what your pap and I decided was the best bang for our buck." Sitting before me was a white car, with four doors, nothing automatic, and crank windows. Oh, and did I mention it didn't have CD player either? My initial response to the car was disappointment, I mean in the dark I couldn't even figure out how to turn on the lights! It had one of those pull switches. But as the days past I couldn't have been happier with my car. It was mine. And I could go anywhere I wanted to!

That little car made me happy as I drove back and forth to high school, and college, and yes, I even began seminary driving that little car. It made me happy until the day that my baby brother received his first car. I watched as my dad and my brother followed a very similar pattern to what I experienced when we planned for my first car. They made a list. Eric wanted a truck that had four-wheel drive, everything automatic, an option for an ipod hook-up, all leather interior. I giggled a little knowing my car didn't have a single thing from my "wants" list. I wondered if he knew.

Well the day arrived and I still remember my jaw dropping on the floor when Eric and my dad returned home from the dealership and I saw the green truck, with four-wheel drive, everything automatic, all leather interior and an ipod dock pulled into the driver. And suddenly my little car, which only cost \$5000 paled in comparison to my brothers Cadillac of a truck that cost \$17000. In that moment I wasn't happy for my brother. I was mad as heck for me. Why did he get everything he wanted and I got absolutely nothing? It wasn't fair.

I have to be honest when I read the parable we have as our gospel lesson for today that is the very first thing that runs through my mind, "that is sooo not fair!" How is it that the people who work all day long in the vineyard get paid the same exact amount as the people who work significantly less time? Why were the workers who were hired later in the day not waiting on the streets to be hired first thing in the morning? I don't know about you, but I imagine them lying around their house and watching television, or sleeping in. And I know what I'd be doing, if I needed a job I'd be in line waiting and begging for a job to provide for my family.

And another thing, why does the vineyard owner pay the workers in reverse order, so they can know that this injustice happened? If they would have received payment in the order that began work they would have never known! You know the old adage; ignorance truly is

bliss! There truly is so much going on in this parable and I don't know about you, but I don't like it at all. You see I was brought up in America. And in America we are taught as young children that if you work hard enough, if you put in your time, you can achieve anything; you can be anything you want to be when you grow up. And if we read this parable and are completely honest with ourselves this parable goes against everything that we've been taught. Maybe that's why it's one of my least favorites!

When I hear the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, what I hear is you can do whatever you want, you can show up whenever you want, and you can get away with murder! Your reward will be exactly like mine, and I've been working my whole entire life. I'm the one who has been doing the things that need to be done, not the other person. I'm the one who serves on every committee, not that person! I'm the one who picks up the slack, not them! Think about it. When we read this parable I assume what most of us hear is injustice and unfairness. But I want you to consider for just a moment that injustice is NOT what this parable is actually about, but it is about generosity.

Here Jesus' words to me and to you today, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" If I'm totally honest with you and with myself, when I read this parable I get a tinge of works righteousness that creeps into my heart. What I have been taught is that I will be rewarded from my good works. But in this parable Jesus turns that concept, that thought on his head. And I am reminded that my reward has nothing to do with my actions at all, but on the absurd and extravagant generosity and love of God, because it is his gift to give.

God is really good at taking all the things that the world teaches us and turning them upside down and reminding us that God and his love simply do not work like that. Prior to the

parable for this morning in the previous chapter of Matthew, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God belonged to little children. And children as you know don't have much to offer to the world, other than their cuteness and love. We associate God's kingdom with the righteous and the proud and the mighty. Jesus also told a rich man that keeping God's commandments wasn't enough, that if he truly wanted to follow Jesus he had to sell all of his possessions. I probably don't have to tell you that the world teaches us that the more things we have the happier we are. But Jesus reminded them, and he reminds us that a relationship with him is much more important than anything else. And at the end of this chapter we have Jesus saying the last will be first and the first will be last. When I hear that verse I'm reminded of black Friday, the day after thanksgiving when after being thankful for the blessings God has given them, we trample one another to try and save a few dollars on Christmas gifts.

As Christians God calls us to be different. He calls us to not worry about fairness, and continually reminds us that God is anything but fair when it comes to us. He loves us fully, completely, and abundantly with no strings attached. He loves us when we choose to be lazy. He loves us when we don't help our neighbors when we could. He loves us when we choose the world over him. He loves us unconditionally. So it should be no surprise to us when he chooses to love others in the same manner.

Today in this gospel lesson that may cause you to cringe I invite you to hear the good news! God loves us when we are the first to get to his vineyard in the morning and he loves us when we are the last ones to show up. And not only does he love us, but he wants a relationship with us. That's why I continue to show up even when I know God doesn't require it. I'm certain that's why you show. So let us stop comparing ourselves to each other; after all comparison is the thief of joy. Let us instead be about relationships and love. Because that's the kind of God we

serve, and he calls us to be imitators of him, especially with his absurd and abundant generosity.

Amen.