

Date: September 20, 2026 (Pentecost 17)

1. Texts: Exodus 16:2-15; Ps. 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16.
2. Subject: the theology about God.
3. Topic: God as divinely generous, without regard to rank.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "Like all parables, today's parable is about God, our generous Saviour."

OUR GENEROUS GOD

If we're to make sense out of Jesus' parable for today, we'll have to start with our definition of parable.

A parable is a *story*, told by *Jesus*, to teach us a **lesson about God and his people**, using *everyday circumstances*, sometimes with a *surprise*.

All Jesus' parables are fictional stories. While they all communicate his truth, none of them are biographical.

While other people wrote parables, Jesus cornered the market on them, just as Aesop did with fables.

Jesus' parables always teach us first about God and then about the people of God. Whenever we think about a parable, we should start with what it says about God and expand our thoughts from there.

Jesus used everyday circumstances in telling his stories. This made them easy to remember and easy to interpret. But those circumstances are *his*, not ours. So we have to think like a first century Palestinian Jew, as much as we can.

Often the parables have a surprise, like the unjust judge who paid attention to the widow or the bad guy from Samaria who took care of the wounded Jew. The surprises highlight the lesson Jesus intended to teach. Again, we have to read them with first century Palestine in mind. Jesus' surprises are surprises to his audience, not necessarily to ours.

So, a parable is a *story*, told by *Jesus*, to teach us a **lesson about God and his people**, using *everyday circumstances*, sometimes with a *surprise*.

In this parable of the labourers in the vineyard, we have a fictional story told by Jesus to teach his disciples something about God. This is important to sort out.

By this point in the chapter, Jesus is speaking to his disciples, not to the Pharisees. So, this isn't a parable about how the first generation Christians are the first labourers and the later labourers are the Gentiles who come to the faith later. Jesus is speaking to his disciples.

That means that Jesus is not speaking about how the latest disciples are equal to the first disciples. He certainly is not speaking about how Gentile disciples are equal to Jewish disciples. Jesus is speaking to all of his disciples *about God*. Remember, all parables teach us lessons about *God* and his people. Looking at the parable through this lens, we find an interesting truth *about God*.

God doesn't care about when his disciples come to him in faith. The first disciples don't receive more grace than the later ones. The later ones are not penalized for having come to faith late. The truth is, God is equally and extravagantly generous to each disciple. This parable is all about our generous God, who is extravagant with his grace, love and salvation.

So, if you're sitting there, regretting that you weren't more faithful in your youth, give up that regret. God is extravagantly in love with you and is eternally pleased that you have responded in faith to his invitation.

If you're aggravated that some prison inmate has just come to faith and received forgiveness, give up that judgment. God is extravagantly in love even with criminals and is overwhelmingly pleased that even such a person has turned to him to receive forgiveness.

That's the point of this parable. God is in love with us and longs to shower us with forgiveness, grace and salvation whenever we are ready to ask for it. The early adopters are not to receive more. The late adopters shouldn't receive less. The point is, we all receive forgiveness, grace and salvation whenever we turn to

God in faith—even if we our sin should outweigh the ability of every adult Canadian to ever pay the cost.

There is, I think, a secondary lesson to this parable.

Our God is extravagantly in love with each and every disciple, whenever they should come to faith. But each of us, having received the extravagant forgiveness, grace and love of God, is obligated to share the same with other people, both disciples and non-disciples. Having received grace upon grace, we share that grace with others. We have been made new in Christ. Because of that new existence, we are to share that with others. Our relationship of faith makes us Christlike, which we demonstrate in our words and actions.

This is not difficult when it comes to our families, friends and the neighbour in the pew. It certainly is difficult when it comes to others who do not share our political opinions. The difficulty does not relieve us of the obligation to share God's grace and love, but it does demand sacrifices from us.

But let's be yet clearer. While we are obligated by our own salvation to share salvation with others, we are not obligated to tolerate persecution, oppression and violence perpetrated by others. We cannot accept racism, bigotry or tyranny exercised by others. Our salvation obligates us to struggle against cruelty, repression and harassment. When the words and actions of another person creates barriers to the reception of God's love, then we must campaign against those words and actions. Working against hate, oppression and persecution is as much an obligation as is the sharing of forgiveness, love and salvation.

These are the lessons from this parable.

A parable is a *story*, told by *Jesus*, to teach us a **lesson about God and his people**, using *everyday circumstances*, sometimes with a *surprise*.

And today we have learned about our God who is extravagantly in love with us and who has changed our lives because of that love. AMEN.