

WELCOME

Grace and Peace be with you in the name of our Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Whether you are joining us from near or far, from a quiet room, a busy home, or somewhere in between, we are glad you are here.

Today, we gather as a community of faith to listen for the voice of the Holy One, to be challenged by the words of Jesus, and to remember that grace does not always follow the rules we expect.

Some of us come today feeling like we have been working in the vineyard all day. Some of us come feeling like we barely made it in at the last hour. Some of us come tired, frustrated, hopeful, curious, or just trying to hold it together.

Wherever you find yourself, you are welcome here.

May this time together open our hearts, soften our envy, strengthen our love, and remind us that in the kin-dom of God, there is enough.

Enough grace.
Enough mercy.
Enough room.
Even for the one who came last.

Welcome to worship.
This is First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life, a real UCC church with full standing in the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

A place that welcomes you and wants you to know that:
No matter who you are,
or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here.

Just a quick reminder that our music will be on the media viewer, so please be sure your voice and media are turned on.

If you're not sure how to do that, just let someone know and we'll gladly help.

There will also be a link in Nearby Chat so you can watch in your browser if the viewer isn't working for you.

As a real UCC congregation, we help support the wider church in prayer and in finances.
We're deeply grateful for any offering you feel led to share.

You can use the donation bowl next to the red book in the back or visit our website, firstuccsl.org.

My name is Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna,
and I am one of the pastors in this community.

Anyone you see with a “Minister” tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

And now friends, let us open our hearts to the Spirit’s movement among us as we worship together.

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place and wherever this worship service is being tuned in with your presence.

We ask at this moment that you infuse the wifi waves with your peace and joy.

And may our time together be one that fills our cup as we begin a new week together.

In Jesus name we pray,
Amen

Gathering Song -

Tim McGraw - Humble And Kind (Official Music Video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awzNHuGqoMc&list=RDawzNHuGqoMc&start_radio=1

SCRIPTURES

Today’s reading comes from the gospel of Matthew 20:13-16 NRSV

But he replied to one of them,

“Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?

Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON

One of the most difficult parables to read is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, especially when we read it through a different lens.

A lens of discomfort.

A lens of poverty.

A lens of scarcity.

When you have money and are comfortable, this parable can be a bit annoying.

Like, dude, you got your wage. You worked for your money.
Let it go, bro.

But let me explain what is happening here.
Imagine you show up to work on some land where there is labor to be done.

I'm talking about cutting grass, mowing the lawn, mulching, pulling weeds,
using a wheelbarrow to bring in dirt, digging, sweating, and really working with the
land—with your hands, your back, your sweat, and your hardworking body.

You are told to come in at 8 a.m., and you start your work for, let's say, \$100 for
the day.

I'm keeping the math and the scenario simple.
Stay with me, church. No algebra today.

So you start working.

At 10 a.m., another person shows up and starts working right alongside you.

The sun is not that bad yet because it is still early, but you can already feel the
muggy, hot air.

That sticky kind of heat.
The kind of heat where even your eyelashes start sweating.

Every hour or so, another person shows up, and you're like,
"Okay, more people to help with the work.
Awesome. This place is starting to really look nice."
Now here is where it gets messy.

Quitting time is 5 p.m., and you have been there since when?
8 a.m.

At 4 p.m., another person shows up, and you're like, "What is he here for?
To pick up the bags of grass? I mean, we are about done!"

Your body aches.
Your skin is toasted by the sun.
Your shirt has become one with your body.

But it is all a good day's work,
and you can't wait to go home with your hard-earned \$100.

So now everyone starts getting in line behind you because you were there first.
You get your \$100.
Come on, Benji.

And you step aside, about to leave, when you turn and realize that every single person behind you is also getting \$100.
Every one of them.
Including the dude who came in at 4 p.m..

That guy literally just got there.

How is this fair?
Is this envy?
Is this jealousy?

If you see this from the lens of someone who is used to being screwed over, you might automatically jump up and say, "It figures. It always happens to me!"

If you see this from the lens of someone a little more chill, you might think, "Maybe I misunderstood."

Maybe I can ask for more. And if not, ni modo.
I should have known better."

Or you could just fly off the handle like the worker in the scripture did.

That is why, in the scripture, the landowner says,
"Friend, did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?"
In other words, "Didn't you agree that I would pay you this? You can't be mad now."

Then the landowner says, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"

Or are you envious because I am generous?"
Oh.
Oh, to me, that sounds like a taunt.

Like, are you kidding me?
It is not fair.
Yes, it is your money, but it is not fair!
The words, "Are you envious?"
Ay.

Envy, friends, is resentment that can grow legs.
It can move through us like a sickness, spreading hostility and hate all over the place.

Envy is like a poison you have to handle with gloves because if you are not careful, it gets into your bloodstream and makes you sick.

Handle with care.
And envy is one of the keys to capitalism.

It thrives on marketing, advertising, enticing, and connecting with our emotional engine.

It elevates people to godlike status: celebrities, YouTubers, influencers, fame. It tells us, "Look what they have. Look what you don't have. Look who is ahead of you.

Look who got more. Look who did less and still got blessed."

And who better than Jesus knew this?

Here is a generous landowner who wants to give everyone who helped the same amount of money.

It is a pivot in the way things are supposed to be.

Very Jesus-like.

But is it fair?

Jesus, with his parables, sometimes sounded very Karl Marx.

Karl Marx once wrote, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

And Jesus, in this parable, sounds like he is turning the whole economic order upside down.

And that was, and is, scary.

Many might call it a communist act.

Recently, Representative AOC, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, was asked if she believed our country was being pushed toward communism because she was demanding healthcare for all.

She stopped, laughed, and said something like,

"How long have we been trying to get the minimum wage up?

Do you really think this country would just turn communist?"

Then she pointed to other countries, like Germany

and Canada, and asked why all people should not have equal access to healthcare.

And there it is again.

Envy.

Will you take my healthcare?

Will you take my wages?

Why is this fair?

I worked harder than you.

I worked longer than you.

Why do you get the same?

Envy and love do not go hand in hand.

They do not even make sense in the same room.

Practicing love, being a disciple, requires a commitment to what is good.

To love God.
To love one another.
To care for the vineyard.
To care for the land.

To care for the work, even when someone else receives the same wage you did.
When Jesus said,
“The last will be first, and the first will be last,” it sounded like nonsense to many.
What?

But we live in a world where we have gotten used to stepping over someone to get ahead.
Taking more because we want more.
Punishing people for feeding the homeless.

Making it harder to offer assistance to those in need.
The Jesus way makes no sense in a world built on envy.

But here is the flip side.
If you have ever been in a position where you do not qualify...

Where you might not make it...
Where you do not have enough...
Where you cannot afford it...

Where your life has become dangerously low on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs...
Then you will see this parable in a whole new way.
Because now you are not the person who worked all day and got mad.
You are the one who showed up late because life happened.

Because the ride did not come.
Because the job fell through.
Because the baby was sick.
Because the depression was heavy.

Because the system had already told you no before you even opened your mouth.
And then here comes a generous landowner saying,
“It’s okay. Come work. I’ll pay you enough to live.”

Now the parable feels different.
Now it does not feel unfair.
Now it feels like grace.
So I wonder.

Did the man who was upset go home and stay angry?

Did he come back later to steal more because, by God, he deserved more and what the landowner did was not fair?
Or did he finally see the point?

Did he look around and realize that everyone went home with enough?

Did he realize that maybe the kingdom of God is not about getting ahead of your neighbor,
but making sure your neighbor also has what they need?

Because maybe the question is not, "Why did they get the same as me?"
Maybe the question is, "Why am I angry that someone else had enough to live?"
And ay, church, that one stings.

That is the Gospel messing with us again.
That is Jesus turning the vineyard upside down.

That is grace showing up at 5 p.m. with a paycheck and saying:
"Friend, there is enough.

Even for the one who came last.
Even for you."

So here is the action item for this week:

Notice where envy shows up in you.
Not to shame yourself.
Not to beat yourself up.
Just notice it.

When you feel that little voice saying,
"Why did they get that?" or "Why do they deserve help?" or
"Why are they getting blessed when I worked harder?" pause and ask:
Is this envy talking?
Is this scarcity talking?

Or is the Gospel inviting me to rejoice that someone else has enough?

And then do one generous thing.

Pay for someone's meal.
Share a resource.

Bless someone's good news without comparing it to your own.

Support a worker, a family, a ministry, or a neighbor who needs enough to make it through the day.
Because the kingdom of God is not built by asking,
"Why did they get the same as me?"

The kingdom of God begins when we can say, "Thank God they also have enough."
Even for the one who came last.
Even for them.

Even for us.
May it be so.
Amen

PRAYER PREPARATION

We have come to the time where we come together in prayer.
Let us give thanks for the gift of this day
and pray for the life of the world.

If you have a prayer of joy or concern that you wish to lift to God, and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, we invite you to share.
As this song plays, in the silence of our hearts or type your request in the nearby chat.

If I Had a Hammer - Peter, Paul & Mary (1962)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGMOB2K78iM&list=RDlGMOB2K78iM&start_radio=1

COMMUNITY PRAYER

If there was a prayer inside of you that you couldn't quite get out, it's ok.
Because the Psalmist tells us that God knows what we are going to say before the words can even form on our tongues.
And so we know.
We know that God has heard our prayers.
Those spoken out loud, those typed into SL chat, and those spoken only in the silence of our hearts.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy One,
We pray for all who feel forgotten, overlooked, or left waiting in the vineyard of life.

Be near to those who are tired, hungry, underpaid, unemployed, grieving, or afraid.

Soften our hearts where envy has taken root, and open our eyes to the needs of our neighbors.

Teach us to rejoice when others receive enough to live, enough to breathe, enough to begin again.
Make us people of generosity, justice, and grace.
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now in the grace of the Holy One.
May you trust that there is enough:
enough mercy,

enough love,
enough room,
and enough grace.

May you rejoice when your neighbor has enough,
and may you become part of God's generosity in the world.
Go in peace, go in justice, go in love.
Amen.

Music for the Journey

Justin Timberlake - CAN'T STOP THE FEELING! (
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru0K8uYEZWw&list=PLEPQby6_o7m1S4DslnGam71gNt4bgPqCE

Go in Peace
Amen