

Reflections on the Gospel

REFLECTING THE GENEROSITY OF GOD

Today's Gospel is introduced as a parable 'about the kingdom of heaven'. That is, it illustrates the way in which God's rule is reclaiming the world for values that allow people to live lives that are human in the fullest sense of the word.

In the Palestine of Jesus' time, employment was for many a day to day business. Whether labourers got work—and the wage they needed to support themselves and their families—depended on whether they were hired for that day in the marketplace.

The story presupposes a long working day with successive hirings during the day. The 'just wage' agreed upon at the start of the day would have been a denarius, the standard wage for a day's labour. This is in fact what everyone receives, but when those who have laboured since early morning see even the latecomers paid this wage, they expect that in *their* case 'a just wage' will mean considerably more. Hence their grievance.

Jesus' message is that we cannot simply take the conventional idea of justice and apply it without qualification to God. God *is* just, but, beyond justice, reserves the right to be overwhelmingly generous as well. If the landowner, out of wider social concern, chooses to be generous and to pay everyone, deserving or not, what social justice today would call a 'living wage', this truly reflects the will and action of God. Aligning ourselves with this view of God has much to do with allowing the values of the kingdom to transform our lives and our world.

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