

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska.

Message from Rev. Israel Portilla-Gómez, Associate Rector. June 25, 2023

Scripture readings: Exodus 16: 2-15; Psalm 105: 1-6, 37-45, **Matthew 20: 1-16**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

Today's central message is: let God be God and let's see the work he does in us without comparing ourselves to others or envying them. When was the last time you thought or said, 'I wish I were...'? I hope, it was decades ago that you felt that.

God calls us to gratitude. You can always find someone you superficially think is smarter, funnier, prettier, kinder or more hard-working. It is an endless list, isn't it? Have you heard of the saying: "The grass is always greener on the other side?" We certainly are not the same in many areas of life, for example, physically or emotionally, and so on. We are different in many ways, but we are equal in value. We are unique and unrepeatable. Indeed, we are. If we look at tiny snowflakes, NOT two of them are alike! And it is so much more accurate about us; we are coated in stunning beauty and uniqueness.

In the Gospel, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven with the owner of a farm. God is the owner. The farm is the kingdom of heaven, which translates into his plan of salvation, his redemptive and loving work for each of us. That is where he calls us to be his workers. Time is the moment in our lives when we encounter it in a special way at different stages of our lives. However, all the workers in the parable have something in common: they need work. We all need the salvation that comes from God.

The parable takes place in one day, approximately 12 hours, beginning at 6 AM and ending at 6 PM. On 5 occasions, the owner went out to look for workers: at 6 AM, at 9 AM, at noon, at 3 PM, and the last time, with only one working hour left, at 5 PM. When he met the latter group, he asked them: "Why are you here all day without working?" They answered: "Because no one has hired us." So he invited them to work. Can you imagine the joy of these workers when they were called to work? They must have already considered that their day had been wasted and that

they would have nothing to take back home. Now, they could at least count on an hour's work salary.

When the time comes to pay, at the end of the day, the owner does something surprising and even unfair to our human logic. He begins by paying the latter group the entire day's wages. As it was, the others thought that those who had worked early would be paid more. According to the logic of the 6 AM workers, they should have received 11 times more income because they had worked 11 hours more; although, from the beginning they had arranged a day's salary with the owner. Everyone received the same compensation regardless of hours worked. Therefore, they complained to the owner. I imagine they thought it would have been better to come last. But he wasn't doing any injustice. He paid them the day's wages that they had agreed upon and that - by the standards of the time - was fair.

God's justice and plans are not tailored to our desires, thoughts, or beliefs. We cannot trap God to deliver what is only mine, to my measure and to my liking. He evades our judgments and limited views of reality.

The equality and justice that human beings see are superficial. We do not know if the last workers had a very great need. On the one hand, although undeserved compared to others, that day's salary could have been the opportunity to give a good meal to their families. On the other hand, if they had received payment for only one hour, perhaps that would not have been enough to satisfy hunger in their homes. Those who arrived first did not think of that. They only thought of themselves, of appearances, of showing off that they had endured the "work and heat of the entire day."

The invitation of the Word of God today is for us to look at the wonders that God does in us and with us. Let us feel happy and grateful that God calls us to his kingdom, and that his merciful and unfathomable love embraces us and renews us every day. Let us be aware that God's love is free and unconditional. Let us not pretend that God acts as we would like. His designs are boundless. His love is real and true. It touches us. We can feel it. Let us not be envious that his love reaches even to those we consider evil. We don't know what everyone's story is or why they are the way they are. Let's not compare ourselves with others. We are unique,

beautiful, and unrepeatable. We are precious God's creation. And let's remember: whether we are the first or last to arrive, his love for us goes beyond our merits or efforts. Amen.