

“The Daily Wage”

**“Friend, I am not doing you wrong, did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?”
Matthew 20:13b.**

The questions that are raised in today’s lessons are about justice meted out, needs addressed and the graciousness of a loving God. It is about community relationships, caring and support. It is about individual and collective responsibilities and about the risks, hardships and faith that are needed in the body of Christ. We are now embarking on a journey that will not be to a distant land but to a little known state; not to an unknown experience but to a seldom visited place. May God guide us and keep us!

His name was Jonathan. He lived in the village of Jaffa near Nazareth. He, along with others, was waiting in the marketplace to be hired as a day laborer. His family back home had only enough food to last for that day. At six a.m., he watched as some laborers were hired. At nine o’clock, others were selected. Still, he stood patiently waiting. Then again at twelve noon and at three p.m., he observed others being hired. Four p.m. came and he still waited. Finally, as five o’clock p.m. was nearing, he saw the vineyard owner approaching and was employed.

After working one hour, the vineyard owner call all of the laborers together to give them their pay. He called the last group, along with Jonathan, first and gave them a day’s wage. Now Jonathan had enough money to feed his family for another day, although he had worked only one hour.

I know that you are now saying, “That is not how I remember the story or at least the emphasis of it.” Well, that is the positive spin that was intended for the men who had to feed their families for the next day. You may then say, that is not the way one should run a business. And you are right, maybe. After all, Paul had written the following words to the community in Thessalonika, *“If anyone will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.”* II Thessalonians 3:10-12. Paul was speaking against sloth which should never be rewarded. This parable is about something different. I said maybe about ways of running a business because any business that takes care of its CEO and shareholders and is not concerned about its employees and clients is heading for failure.

Jonathan stood in the marketplace all day with the faith and patience to believe that somehow the Lord would help him provide his family with their daily bread and he was not disappointed in the end. In the story about workers in the vineyard, we are not speaking about the world and businesses in it as we usually see them operate. It is about the kingdom of God and subsequently how Christians should be guided in their thinking and caring about the people of their community. It is about families, churches and the Christian community with different needs and differing abilities. And, it is about a Christian ethic that Jesus taught for the transformation of the world.

In our story, there are several things that we can take note of. 1. It is a matter of justice? An injustice was not done to the twelve hour workers because they were promised a denarius and they received a denarius. 2. Is it a matter of need? I think so because each worker needed a denarius to feed his family and received one. Is it a matter of generosity and God’s grace? Of course. God is gracious to whom God will be gracious and none of us should

should begrudge another of God's blessings. Well then, you will ask, "What about fairness? Was it fair that the one hour worker received the same pay as the twelve hours workers?"

We have a daughter who works for the American International Group Insurance Company. We are happy for her that she will still have a job with AIG because of the federal loan bailout. Is it fair that tax paying citizens' funds should bailout AIG? In my opinion as a non-economist, greed, predatory lending, wild speculations, pulling the cap of deregulation and unwise decisions on the individual and collective levels have helped to created the wind that is causing us to reap the whirlwind of the economic down-turn. They are helping to cause Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Lehman Brothers and AIG to be in trouble, millions of homeowners to lose their homes and much unemployment. Prudence in insuring our futures is important. We should save for the rainy day. Humans have gotten rid of much of the anxiety and frustration that plagued primitive man for millennia. However, A day's worth at a time is not only a good principle to live by but it is how our Lord Jesus teaches us to live day by day because "all things come of thee, O Lord!" Many things like the collected manna in today's Hebrew scripture, when we build bigger barns to store up abundance rather than sharing with others, will turn sour and decay.

There are some places where the story of the vineyard workers are apropos. Take in a family, for example. You have babies, children, teens, young adults, adults and the elderly. Each is differently capable of contributing to the whole. Yet, no one tells the baby and the elderly sick person that they can not eat because they can not presently contribute a lot to the family storehouse. So too with the teen or young adult. No family that I know of would even think of denying these members of the family their daily bread. In a way they are the eleventh hour workers. The elderly have done their work. The young will do their later, hopefully. Why is it then often the case that in the church some will feel that because they have been there fifty years that they are entitled in a way a person of just two years membership is not?

Today, we are incorporating young Carter Rees Brown into the body of Christ. Born in earthly time on June 5, 2008 and now baptized on September 2, 2008, he will be a full member of the church, a child of God, an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven and a joint heir with Christ just like you and me. Although, he is like the eleventh hour worker, he is entitled to his denarius just like you and me. Sara and Aaron, Abigail and Toni along with each of us will have the responsibility and privilege of providing for him until he is able to provide for himself. But, each of us in a general way, will as members of the body of Christ, have the privilege of nurturing him in the knowledge and love of the Lord. May we do our jobs well and not begrudge him his denarius.

In closing, I believe that if we here at St. Barnabas church would take that attitude about every single member of our church and about all who come to us, we will grow and continue to blossom in the knowledge and love of God in this part of Christ's vineyard.

Let us pray. O God who has taught us to love you and to love one another: We pray your blessing upon Carter Rees Brown and on all of the members of your church. Give us the strength to work while it is day, for night comes when no one can work. Bless the members of St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church and all your children everywhere. Give us grateful hearts, ready hands and the will to serve you and one another always we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.