

The Work Of The Harvest

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[0 : 0 0] you have been found in the bystander version I'm going to read it to you from Matthew from the J.B. Phillips translation and you with your eye on one version and your ear on another I trust will not be confused too much for the kingdom of heaven is like a farmer going out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard he agreed with them on a wage of a silver coin a day and sent them to work about nine o'clock he went out and saw some others standing about in the market place with nothing to do you go to the vineyard too he said to them and I will pay you a fair wage and off they went at about midday and again about three o'clock in the afternoon he went out and did the same thing then about five o'clock he went out and found some others standing about why are you standing about here all day doing nothing he asked them because no one has employed us they replied you go off into the vineyard as well then he said when evening came the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman call the laborers and pay them their wages beginning with the last and ending with the first so those who were engaged at five o'clock came up and each man received a silver coin but when the first to be employed came they reckoned they would get more but they also received a silver coin a man and as they took their money they grumbled at the farmer and said these last fellows you have only put in one hour's work and you have treated them exactly the same as us who have gone through all the hard work and even the day and he replied to one of them my friend i'm not being unjust to you wasn't our agreement for a silver coin a day take your money and go home it is my wish to give the late comers as much as i give you may i not do what i like with what belongs to me must you be jealous because i am generous so many who are the last will now be first and the third last well you have to get a picture and it perhaps helps to have in your mind a picture of a silver coin a roman coin called the denarius which was the equivalent of a day's wages for a working man the second thing you have to be aware of is the marketplace now in toronto and i'm afraid i haven't found the place in vancouver maybe one of you can tell me in toronto at the corner of dundas and harlan there is a park and in the park there are a number of spaces and from early in the morning till late at night there are men who presumably have slept in the salvation army hospital across the road sitting in those spaces they are curved out at the hospital before 7 in the morning there is no sleeping in there so there they are on the basis and all day long people arrive in cars and pickup trucks and beds and buses and say we need four men we need five men we need ten men and sometimes all the men are gone by at nine o'clock in the morning

and sometimes they are still sitting there at five or six in the afternoon so that is something which happened a long time ago the same kind of labor market where the mayor there waiting to be hired and the owners of various farms and industries come around and pick them up and take them away to do a day's work now this particular farmer we must imagine was a man who had leased some land on which he was growing vines and vines produced grapes and grapes produced wine and he got up early in the morning every day and he went out and he looked at his grapes and he saw them forming into little bunches and he saw them gradually swelling with the rain and the sunshine and he had anxious moments lest there was too much sun or not enough rain but they came slowly to the point that one morning he went out and said this is the day the great need to be harvested today and all the labor of the year was really dependent on what was the place that day and so at the very first of dawn he was off to the labor market to pick up some people to help him harvest the grapes and he got a whole bunch of men he arranged a verbal contract with them in which he said that he would give them a denarius one of these silver coins for a day's work and that was fair and just and a good reward for their day's work and they were happy to go with him and to start that the sun was just coming over the eastern horizon to do their day's work in the vineyard and they labored on but they weren't getting any work done and there was a valuable harvest and so the farmer went back again at nine o'clock and got more men and said whatever's fair I will pay you the

harvest is ready and must be brought in and then he went back at noon and he went back at three in the afternoon and there were more men available and he brought them all and had them work in his vineyard and at five o'clock he went out and found men still standing there and said why are you standing idle there's work to be done and they agreed to do it and they went with him to his vineyard as well and so when the end of the day came at six o'clock he said to the foreman pay them off today's work is done and perhaps he had some satisfaction that a lot of work had been done that the back of the harvest had been broken and that the year at that looked good and promising in view of the rich harvest that had been taken in and there would be grace everywhere and all the evidence of how hard things were having been done

I don't know whether there were vats and people walking around in it in their bare feet crushing the grapes or not but if you want to you can add all sorts of imaginary details to the story and make you quite thirsty as we go along what happened then of course was that he said to those who had come last in the day here is your money and he gave them a denarius and they were delighted and then he gave those who had worked from the middle of the afternoon and he gave them a denarius and they were delighted too but they were beginning to feel a little lazy we had to work from three till six these guys only worked from five till six and then when he got back to the people who had worked all the afternoon and then all the people who had worked most of the morning and all the afternoon and then finally the people who had worked from early in the morning to late in the afternoon and he gave them a denarius and the problem is then what in your lap as it was in there slowly as the story develops our stomachs tighten into a knot because there is some injustice here the reporting to the labor office will have to be done before we go home to supper tonight our union officials will hear and people begin to feel angry and people begin to feel jealous and people begin to suffer because of the jealousy that they feel now it wasn't anybody who imposed this on them they imposed it on themselves and so by the end of the day those men who were in the morning grateful to have been invited to take a day's work for a day's wages found themselves murmuring against the good man of the house well the good man of the house said to them in that sort of remarkable statement that he made may I not do what I like with what belongs to me now all of you who are committed seriously to the capitalist system strongly believe in that may I not do what is right with what belongs to me and nobody would deny you that right and if they won't deny a mere capitalist that right who has the right to deny God that he does what he wants with what belongs to him and this of course is the difficulty in the story now to bring the story closer to home

I would say that he's talking about the kingdom of God and how the kingdom works and the kingdom works in this way what you are right now as a gathered group of people this morning is a microcosm of the kingdom here we are now one of the things that we try to do is not to give people work too because they're all very busy and uh church life is a lot easier as long as nobody has to take any responsibility I am speaking with my um well anyway uh the difficulty is in fact uh I met with some of the ladies running the bazaar this week and one of them suggested that every family in the parish has contributed at least one jar of jitter or jelly to the bazaar which would mean that we would have something in the neighborhood of 650 jars of jitter and jelly now my contention is that since that notice appears in the bulletin in the 20s under jays and jellies which you may take to be more waiting back but it isn't it uh it just means jams and jellies um that even this gracious and minimal kind of demand will not meet with overwhelming response but I think that perhaps what we'll do between now and bazaar time is seek you informed as to how many of those 650 jar jays and jellies come in but uh you see the difficulty is is when the church goes to work when the kingdom suddenly says well there are responsibilities to be met and we have to meet them and then everybody goes to work well it's hard to come to that point in a congregation for reasons that are illustrated by this terrible we have a rich harvest there are elderly people to be visited there are retarded people in our congregation to be welcomed and incorporated into the life of the congregation there are young people to be intellectually convinced of the truth of the Christian faith and spiritually challenged of the potential of the Christian faith and socially involved in the Christian community and that's a big challenge that we haven't begun to meet a tremendous harvest awaits us there there there's a great deal of reading to be done because we are uninformed at the congregation there's a great deal of study and prayer once again I will refer to the bulletin the Ember Days are just special days of prayer and those services are the everyday

Wednesday, Friday and Saturday which are the Ember Days this week there will be morning prayer noon day prayer, evening prayer at 7.30 12 noon and 5.30 in the evening on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday so that there is that kind of prayer to be done and we need people who can labor in

prayer for the life of our parents there is the worship, worship which has to be taken seriously and then there are prisoners to be visited hungry to be fed sick to be healed dying to be comforted and the kingdom to be proclaimed so that there is a great harvest which requires workers and you people are to be involved in that work not necessarily within the narrow confines of the organizational structure of this parish but the work is there and the Lord of the vineyard calls you to come and work in his vineyard and to work effectively and a lot of people when they are young and idealistic or when it is early in the day in their minds they are not troubled by other concerns bearing in on them say that they would gladly take on that work and they do gladly take it off and lots of good things start to happen as people take on that responsibility but as the day wears on there is this insidious question which comes to all of us as it changes in Peter in chapter 19 which provokes the telling of this parable and Peter said on behalf of himself and the rest of the disciples what's in it for us?

[15:00] we've left our homes and our families and our businesses to do this work of the kingdom what's in it for us? and once that problem becomes paramount then the problem of the kingdom becomes real because once we take on this job and do it and at the end of our doing it is somehow to build up our own little world and our own little kingdom and to increase our own wealth and our own position then we lose sight of the fact that it is a day of opportunity and the fact that there is a kingdom to be established at all and that's what had happened to the disciples they had seen this rich young man turn away because the kingdom wasn't for him and then they recalled that they had given everything for the kingdom and this question came and infected their minds what's in this for us?

and then when Jesus told this parable he made the problem worse by saying well, I'll tell you what's in it for you for most of you you're going to get more than you deserve but for some of you you may only get what you bargained for and you have no luck to ask anymore and as far as the work of the kingdom is concerned all you can know is that you will get what you bargained for and you may very well get more than you bargained for but the one for whom you're working will do what is right with what belongs to him and your joy will not be ultimately the aggrandizement of your own little kingdom but that you had a share in the kingdom of God now Jesus said that's what the kingdom of God is like and you don't have to spend very long in a church and in the church life to discover that this is both the joy and the tragedy of the kingdom here on earth that there is the opportunity to be involved in this harvest which is infinitely worthwhile the work of the harvest is infinitely worthwhile but as soon as you ask the question what minutes will be you're going to get hurt and it's nobody else who's going to hurt you you're going to hurt yourself you're going to destroy your effectiveness and your usefulness in the kingdom inevitably we all come to that because we're tired because we've worked long and hard because we feel that we've given more than it's our share to give because we have expended the best years of our life because we have been involved in duties that nobody ever said thank you for and so the insidious problem creeps into our lives and we begin to say what's in it for me?

you see the difficulty of course is that along comes somebody much younger than we are perhaps and says what a joy it is to do this and how glad I am that he gets so much out of it we don't get anything out of it because we've been doing it for years and all the joy has gone out of it for us and so we are like those who murmur against the good men of the house that we have been abused that the Lord has taken advantage of us that he's treating those people who've just arrived today as though they had been working all day long or as though they had been working through most of the life of this congregation you see how this jealousy moves in and breaks down the reality of the kingdom that the reality of the kingdom remains as as the Lord says when he concludes the story may I not do what I like with what belongs to me this kingdom of God in which we are called to participate belongs to him and our delight is that he will do what he likes with what belongs to him and the essential thing in being a worker in the kingdom is to have the assurance that you belong to him and that you are not serving your own purposes but him and you know that he will not do less for you that he has agreed and the probability is that he will do a great deal more time and if you are prepared to work under those circumstances the harvest is ready and you have to get involved there came everyone whose heart stirred him up and everyone who his spirit made willing and they brought the Lord's offerings

Sing hymn number 492 Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

[22 : 38] Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you.