

## Lectionary Bible Study Our Savior Lutheran Church



### Lectionary 25 Readings

Jonah 3:10-4:11, Psalm 145:1-8  
Philippians 1:21-30, Matthew 20:1-16

[Click here](#) to join Pastor Mark for a Live Zoom conversation each Wednesday at 10am.

Meeting ID: 868 8793 0554 Password: 654321

Or dial in for audio only: 1-301-715-8592

### Matthew 20:1-16 (NRSV)

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; <sup>4</sup> and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. <sup>5</sup> When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ <sup>7</sup> They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ <sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ <sup>9</sup> When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup> Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup> And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ <sup>13</sup> 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? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

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1. *When you read this parable in its entirety, what is your gut reaction?*

Jesus begins this parable by telling us “the kingdom of God is like a landowner...”

2. *Therefore, to what do we equate God in this parable?*

This parable seems to be about fairness. The vineyard owner hires day laborers for a regular day’s wage. This is enough to feed their family for the day (daily bread?). The people hired

after the morning shift agree to work for “what is right.” The laborers are all paid the same wage. More than that, the ones hired last are let go first. For these people, the owner has been more than fair. Finally, we see the treatment of the first workers in the vineyard. They receive the wages to which they agreed and are the last to stop working.

3. *Does this agreement seem fair?*

The owner did the most for the people who worked the least. In accounting, we would call the landowner using the LIFO method of accounting. LIFO means that the last in is the first out (as opposed to FIFO inventory accounting (first in first out). For obvious reasons, it makes sense to get rid of the inventory (in this case, the workers) received first.

4. *What can we assume about the landowner’s motivations?*

5. *What are the dangers in our assumptions?*

We see the parable turn to generosity. But it seems as if the landowner’s generosity with the last hired offends us when compared with the fairness towards the first hired. If the landowner can afford to be so generous with the last hired, why couldn’t he be as generous with the first hired? These workers want merit pay when it benefits them.

6. *Where have you received generosity in your life?*

7. *Where have you expressed generosity in your life?*

8. *Where have you longed for grace?*

As Jesus tells us this parable, he isn’t practicing economics. He’s practicing theology. The reader/listener is inclined to see God as the landowner generously feeding people, by giving them bread for the day. Other Hebrew stories had God as a landowner and Israel as the vineyard. 2,000 years later we’ve ascribed the title “The Laborers in the Vineyard” to this parable, causing us, the audience, to sympathize with the laborers.

9. *What does this reading of the parable say about God?*

Perhaps we should envision ourselves in another role, other than the role of worker in the vineyard. Perhaps we have had the chance to hire or to offer someone wages.

10. *How could this parable speak into our lives as one who employees people?*

When the landowner pays daily wages to so many employees, the landowner is supporting an entire community, by feeding multiple families for the day.