**September 24, 2023 TENSIONS IN THE WILDERNESS**

The gospel passage for this Sunday, Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus is revealing more of what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. Jesus does this not only to give us some more information but to challenge us to make our own human society resemble more and more of God's Kingdom in Heaven. Jesus wants us to know that when it comes to playing out the game of life here on earth, we are to go more by God's Rules than follow our own made-up rules. God's grace is to always override our human rules.

As we go through the gospel passage the Lord has work for all of us. One of the things that emerges from this passage is the fact that time after time this vineyard owner goes back to get more and more workers. In fact, he goes to the marketplace five different times. He starts out early in the morning, and then returns at the third hour, the 6th hour, the 9th hour and for a final time at the 11th hour.

This parable might be unfamiliar to many of us, however, during that time and even in some places today, day laborers were and are a common sight in the marketplace. People gather from all walks of life seeking for someone to hire them for the day. Some of those seeking such occupation back in Jesus' day would have been slaves that their masters would have tried to rent out for the day. These would be slaves who didn't have enough work on master's place and so their masters would try to pick up a little bit of extra money by renting them out.

Many of those who could not find any day work would try to make their way to the Temple and its surrounding area to beg for a piece of bread or a coin or two from those who were going to say their prayers or attend Torah classes. When Jesus shared this parable all those around him would have fully understood what was going on. The setting was that of a grape harvest which means it was around the time of mid to late September (The Hebrew month of Tishrei). The owners of the vineyards knew that they only had a very short time to get their grape harvests in before the rainy season. That is why we see the landowner coming back time and time again. Time was of the greatest essence.

No doubt those who were listening to Jesus had watched this very scene happen time and time again. And just perhaps some of them listening knew firsthand what it meant to be a day laborer. They too had suffered some type of devastating loss and found themselves needing to find work to put some food on the table, to cloth their family and to keep a roof over their head. Life back then was pretty much day to day.

Just as the Landowner had plenty of work for these laborers to do, we are understanding this morning that the Lord has plenty of work for us to do as well. Our God is on a worldwide rescue and redemption mission. Our God is on a worldwide restoration mission. That rescue, redemption and restoration mission includes not only all of us humans but all of creation as well. For all of creation has been adversely affected by the Fall. We humans of course have suffered the most, but the truth is all of creation has been affected by sin - it's chaos, it's disintegration and death. Therefore, as part of God's Great Co-Mission we are called to make disciples.

Disciples that will live out the life that Jesus' death and resurrection has made possible. Disciples that have repented of their sins, been baptized by water, and infilled by God's Holy Spirit. Disciples that then go out and do God's Work. Work that includes the healing of our bodies, our minds, our souls, and our world. This means that God not only calls ministers and teachers but doctors, nurses, carpenters, bankers, bakers along with secretaries, managers, and bus drivers. He calls people to raise animals, others to care for the environment and still others to help provide food, shelter, and clothing for those living in our world. He calls grief counselors, law officers and a million more different occupations as well. The Great Commission is not only to save people's souls - it is to save God's Good Creation. If you like to know more about the call of God, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

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