

There are stories of Jesus where we pretty quickly know what we are supposed to think about them. And then there are stories like this one.

The workers in the vineyard. A man goes out early in the morning to find workers for his vineyard. He finds some at six o'clock in the morning.

"Come and work in my vineyard." They agree on a daily wage.

Then he goes out again. At nine o'clock, he finds more workers.

At noon, he goes out again. At three o'clock, again.

And finally, at five o'clock — just one hour before the workday is over — he finds more people standing there. "Why have you been standing here all day?"

And they answer: "Because no one has hired us." So he sends them into his vineyard, too.

And then comes the moment when I think we probably all swallow a little hard.

The workday is over.

The landowner has the workers paid.

And he starts with those who came last.

The people who worked only one hour receive a full day's wage.

A full day's wage. Then those who worked longer also receive a full day's wage.

And finally come those who started at six o'clock in the morning.

They have worked all day.

In the heat. In the vineyard. And they receive exactly the same as everyone else who started later. And I think we know their reaction. "Wait a minute."

"That's not fair." And honestly: I understand them.

We live in a world where we have learned to keep score.

More work — more pay.

More achievement — more recognition.

More effort — more reward.

We compare.

We calculate.

We keep track.

Who has done how much?

Who has been here the longest?

Who has given more?

Who has accomplished more?

Who deserves it?

And that is exactly why this parable is so difficult.

Because Jesus tells us about a God who apparently does not keep score the way we do.

The landowner says to the workers:

"Are you envious because I am generous?"

Maybe that is the most important question in this whole story.

What happens when God's grace is greater than our understanding of achievement and deserving?

Because we so easily transfer our ideas about achievement onto God.

We think that if we live a good life, if we try hard, if we are good people, if we regularly go to church, help others, and pray — then we are enough before God.

Then we have earned God's approval.

But that is not the Gospel.

And that is exactly why my Lutheran faith means so much to me.

I think I have always been Lutheran at heart — perhaps even before I really understood what that meant.

And even today, sometimes I wonder whether I fully understand it.

But one thing has always remained:

This understanding of grace has always touched me deeply.

Grace is a gift.

It is not something we have to work for or earn. It is not something we can buy. It is simply a gift.

And a gift is only truly a gift when we don't have to do anything to receive it.

If someone gives me a gift and I say,

“Thank you — but actually, I deserved it anyway.”

Then maybe I haven't quite understood what a gift really is.

And that is what grace is about.

God does not say:

“I love you because you have done enough.”

God says:

“I love you.”

Period.

Simply: **I love you.**

That is grace.

And perhaps that is one of the hardest things for some of us to accept.

Because we want to do something for it.

We want to work.

We want to try harder.

We try to become better people.

But there is one thing we cannot do.

We cannot work our way into God's love.

We can only receive it.

And that is where the story of the workers in the vineyard suddenly becomes our story.

Because sometimes we are the workers who have been there since six o'clock in the morning.

We have done a lot.

We have been faithful.

We have taken responsibility.

We have helped others.

We have been there when others left.

And sometimes we look at the people who came much later and think:

“Why do they get the same as I do?”

But perhaps sometimes we are also the people who are still standing in the marketplace at five o'clock.

We feel like we are too late.

Maybe we have made wrong decisions.

Maybe we have lost time.

Maybe there are things in our lives we wish we had done differently.

And perhaps we wonder:

“Am I even still welcome?”

“Is it too late for me?”

And Jesus says:

No. It is not too late.

The landowner keeps going out.

At nine. At noon. At three. At five. Again and again.

And he sees the people who are still waiting.

He sees those whom no one has hired.

He sees those who may have already given up.

And he says: **“You go into the vineyard too.”**

That is grace. Amen.