

Speaking to the soul



Justice

“For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work.” Matthew 20: 1 -2

All of Jesus' parables are deeply challenging and surprising, and this particular parable is bound to offend anyone who has a natural sense of justice. A landowner hired workers for

his vineyard at various times of the day. Some were hired early morning, and then others at 9am, 3pm and 5pm. So far so good. The problem is that the landowner decided to pay them all the full day's wage. The people who had sweated through the whole day felt that this was profoundly unfair, and I think any trades union official would heartily agree. However, the landowner pointed out that he had every right to do whatever he wanted with his own money.

Jesus was saying that everyone was welcome into his kingdom on exactly the same basis. Those who crept in at the last minute were just as welcome as those who had served him all their lives. God doesn't deal with us on the basis of justice. If he did so, none of us would deserve anything. He deals with us on the basis of grace – sheer gift and generosity. When Jesus said to the thief on the cross beside him: "Today you will be with me in Paradise", I am sure many people found this profoundly unfair. Why should he be blessed in the same way as those who had faithfully served God for years? But that's grace! That's the overwhelming generosity of God, who gladly welcomes every kind of person into his kingdom.

For the Pharisees who assumed that their long adherence to the Jewish law gave them a secure place in God's kingdom, this was all very confusing. The idea that God would welcome Gentiles, who had come very late to the party, was totally baffling to them. But that's grace, and we need to thank God that his arms are outstretched to welcome us and all who are willing to come to him in faith.

QUESTION

How do you respond to the fact that God treats you with grace and not justice?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for your perfect love and grace.
Amen

Photograph - near Slemish, County Antrim

