

September 20, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Reading: Matthew 20.1-16

The Message: "It's Not Fair!"

[Video](#)

Living in a household of two theologically minded parents can add a layer of parenting that is not always welcome.

Our kids took in their stride

- Visiting bishops at the breakfast table and
- Catholic priests doing cannonballs into the pool.

But they did frequently complain that we weren't like their friends' families who never talked about the hard stuff, while we talked their problems "to death."

And they weren't thrilled about being driven to the place of a car accident that took a drunk teen driver's best friend's life and who their mother had to bury.

But we have to confess that it affected our parenting from the very beginning.

When our oldest was just a newborn, sleeping peacefully in her crib, and we were leaning over, watching her in all her perfection, I looked at Alan and said, "Do you believe in original sin?" He shook his head, "No."

A few months later, when she was crying for -- it seemed -- no reason at all, I asked him again, "Do you believe in original sin?"

He answered, "Yes, I think it kicks in at three months."

It doesn't take long to realize we are forced to accept the reality of original sin. Because there is one characteristic that humans possess that does more to deny God than all the atheists in the world: and that sin is ENVY. The kind of envy that wants others to have less than we have.

Jesus tells a parable about envy -- a story about something small that has huge effects. It's a story about a vineyard owner hiring day workers. [Matthew 20.1-16](#)

The vineyard owner goes to the marketplace early one morning where they are hanging out, hoping to be hired. He hires some of them, promising to pay them minimum wage: a denarius -- which was enough to buy wood for the fire to cook dinner and food to feed a family for a day. But at coffee break, he goes back and hires some more workers. Again at noon, and then at tea time.

At the end of the day, the workers line up for their pay. What happens? Do the workers who worked all day get their pay for the day? Yes they do.

How about the workers who were hired later in the morning? A little less? And the ones who were hired at noon, do they get half? And the ones who worked only a few hours, did they get the smallest amount?

NO! They all got the same pay.

'Why should they get as much as us? We worked hard and long for our money -- some of them worked hardly at all! It's not fair!'

It's like the family comedy series where the father gives his oldest daughter a treat for finishing her homework. His seven year old asks for the same treat.

He says, "there was only one."

Her response is, "It's not fair! Why does she get one and I don't?"

"Because you're a separate person. You're never going to get the same things as other people. It's never going to happen. You might as well learn that now."

"It's not fair!"

"You should only be concerned about what someone else gets ... I'm telling you something now ... You should only ever be concerned with what's in ..."

"It's not fair, Daddy!"

"The only time you look in your neighbour's bowl is to make sure that they have enough."

She doesn't understand, he tries to explain, she asks for an alternative treat, he gives in,

and the last thing he says to her is,
"Make sure your sister gets one too."

He failed to convince his daughter that life shouldn't be judged on the basis of what's fair, but it shouldn't be that hard for us.

Often in life we are not allowed to do what we choose with what belongs to us. We pay for governments that don't always do what we want, bureaucracies that seem inefficient, health care for people who don't take care of their bodies. In our world we don't get to do what we want with everything we own.

But God does. God gets to be as generous as God wants. And we don't think that is fair.

What is fair?

We think what is fair is that my family eats and yours doesn't because we are the hard workers. That's what we think is fair.

But God owns the vineyard and gets to decide what is fair. "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"

How do we deal with God's idea of fairness? We grumble. We resent people who get more than we think they deserve.

But God isn't 'on that plain'.

“Are you mad at me because I am generous?” Yes we are. And that’s our original sin -- the one that keeps popping up all through history. Envy pushed to the extreme -- wanting God to be less generous.

But God’s generosity will not succumb to human jealousy. And we just can’t see through God’s eyes. And as long as we can’t, we need to be very very careful about judging what is fair, what is right.

I know a little about a lot of stuff. I’m interested in everything from woodworking to raising chickens (a favourite birthday gift from my husband was entitled, “Raising Poultry the Modern Way), but there are a lot of issues that are facing the world, that I really don’t know enough about, that I can’t see with God’s eyes.

I’m not generous like God so I can’t trust my own opinions about the things that matter.

We need forgiveness for all those times we have turned a lovely gift of grace not deserved into ashes because we don’t want others to have what they don’t deserve.

The first time a theologian friend and mentor of ours crossed the threshold into our new home, he quoted the Anglican Book of Common Prayer: “desired but not deserved.” And I quote that to myself a lot! It keeps me humble.

Instead of leaping to opinions about complex or important issues, we could be looking for what God’s grace looks like in the midst of difficult situations.

Jesus so often helps us to skip the opinion stage and go straight to the need -- perhaps this is a characteristic of the divine in Jesus -- one that separates him from the whiny human envy that doesn’t want to see another person receive God’s grace.

As the ultimate “landowner,” God will use what has always belonged to the Creator for the good of all, even if humans fail to view the world through God’s eyes.