

24 September, 2017
“It’s All About Relationship”

First Reading ~ *Matthew 20: 1-16*

Jesus said, “The realm of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire workers for the vineyard. After reaching an agreement with them for the usual daily wage, the owner sent them out into the vineyard. About mid-morning, the owner came out and saw other laborers standing around the marketplace without work, and said to them, ‘You go along to my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. Around noon and again in the mid-afternoon, the owner came out and did the same. Finally, about five o’clock, the owner went out and found others still standing around and said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They replied, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ The owner said to them, ‘You go to my vineyard, too.’ When evening came, the owner said to the manager, ‘Call the workers and give them their pay, but begin with the last group and end with the first.’ When those hired at about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage, and when the first group came, they assumed they would get more. Yet they all received the same daily wage. Thereupon they grumbled and complained to the owner, saying, ‘This last group did only an hour’s work, but you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ‘My Friends’, said the owner to those who voiced this complaint, ‘I am doing you no wrong, I am doing you no injustice. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this worker who was hired last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Second Reading ~ adapted from Father Richard Rohr in
“God Is Relationship”

We owe a great deal of our Western thinking to the brilliant Greek philosopher and scientist, Aristotle (384-322 BC). Aristotle taught that there were different qualities to all things. I’m not going to list all of them; two will suffice. He said there was “substance” and there was “relationship.”

Substance is that which is “independent” of all else and can stand on its own. Aristotle ranked substance as the highest quality. In early Christian traditions, the West tried to build on Aristotle to prove that this God whom we had come to understand as Trinitarian was a substance. We didn’t want an ephemeral old *relationship* God, you know. We wanted a *substantial* God, one whom we could prove was as good as anybody else’s God!

We humans are not a kind of independent substance, nor is any of creation. Everything exists in radical relationship, which we now call ecosystems, orbits, cycles, and circulatory systems. Yet to the Western mind, this “mere” relationship looks like second or third best: “Who wants to just be a relationship? I want to be a self-made free-standing person.” This hyper-individualism has dramatically impacted Western Life, and Western Christianity.

I would name *salvation* as simply the readiness, the capacity, and the willingness to stay in relationship. As long as you show up with some degree of vulnerability, the Spirit can keep working. *Self-sufficiency makes the God experience impossible.* Please trust me on that. That's why Jesus shows up in this world as a naked, vulnerable one—a defenseless baby. Talk about utter relationship! Naked vulnerability means I'm going to let you influence me; I'm going to allow you to change me. We call this flow *love*. We really were made for love. Outside of it, we die very quickly.