

OUT OF ORDER

September 20, 2020

Proper 20A

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? Are you envious because I am generous?'

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

Second Reading ~ *from Scott Russell Sanders in "Homeplace"*

Since Copernicus we have known better than to see the earth as the center of the universe. Since Einstein, we have learned that there is no center; or alternatively, that any point is as good as any other for observing the world. I take this to be roughly what medieval theologians meant when they defined God as a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere... There are no privileged locations. If you stay put, your place may become a holy center, not because it gives you special access to the Divine, but because in your stillness you hear what might be heard anywhere. All there is to see can be seen from anywhere in the universe, if you know how to look. And the influence of the entire universe converges on every spot.

Third Reading ~ *adapted from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges easily or voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and give up their unjust posture, but as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups are more unjust and immoral than individuals.

An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on the minority that is not binding on itself. This is “difference” made legal. On the other hand, a just law is a code that the majority compels a minority to follow that it is willing to follow itself. This is “sameness” made legal. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of people willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always right to do right.