

On the surface, the Gospel before us seems to be a business transaction between the owner of a vineyard and the men he hired to bring in the harvest. When he realized there was insufficient manpower to gather the grapes in one day, he hired more men at mid-morning, then at midday, followed by mid-afternoon and then at the end of the day. All of these men agreed to work for a just wage.

The owner of the vineyard was so happy with the results of their work that he decided to pay all the men equally. Now, there would not have been a problem had he paid those who worked the entire day first, thanked them for a job well done, and invited them back for the next harvest. **There would also be no story.** It almost seems cruel, when we stop to think about it, to make them wait and see how everyone else received the same compensation although they worked fewer hours. It was only natural that they balked at what appeared to be unfair. It is like people I know who visit the casino -- always for therapy of course -- and play the slots for an hour or two and don't win anything. And then, someone else takes their vacant seat, puts in one quarter, and hits the jackpot.

However, this is not really a story about an employer and employees. It is a parable about the Kingdom so there is a hidden message in this story. And the best way for me to illustrate it is to give you my own story.

A couple of years ago, I went home for the funeral of a cousin. I happened to know that a new pastor had been named for that parish and he was a great priest. I can say that because I knew him personally. When the sacristan came into the church to see if everything was okay, I remarked that they were very fortunate to have such a great pastor. I was not prepared for her response which was something like this.

“He has not been here for over a month and he refers to this as “ou” parish. I have been here all of my life and this is “my” parish, not his.” Well, I had to chuckle at that. I mean Fr. Gendreau lived in the parish, worked in the parish, and worshipped in the parish church. But, in the eyes of this woman, he had no right to call it “our” as if he were part of the parish.

The message Jesus gives us is that we are all invited to share equally in the kingdom. We all have the right to refer to it as our Kingdom. Those who have been Christians for a long time do not have the right to shut the doors against newcomers. After all, the repentant thief got into the Kingdom before the Apostles for which reason *the last shall be first and the first shall be last*. What really counts is that we all have a place in the Kingdom.

Now, there is still another dimension to this story, one that is more beautiful, in my opinion, and spiritual. The landowner who goes out several times a day to hire laborers is Jesus who is tirelessly searching for people to be a part of His Kingdom, represented by the vineyard. We are here because we have been tapped on the shoulder and responded positively to His invitation which is certainly a great thing. But there are others who need to be employed, who should be part of the workforce, which to say, part of the Kingdom. Not only is Jesus searching for them; but insofar as He lives within us, we can become the means whereby others enter the fold.