

The justice of the Kingdom

What do you think of today's Gospel? Does it make you feel upset, that the landowner is not being fair? Ah, yes, this Gospel makes people think Matthew must have made a mistake in writing it down, because Jesus would never be so unfair.

But let me tell you what I see, sometimes back home in India: It is a usual scene that men of all ages waiting to be hired. I know many of them are undocumented and many have wives and children in one state or in another state they support. Work means life to them, any work and any pay. Can you imagine how they feel as the hours tick by and no one hires them? Or can you imagine their joy when someone does? Why? Because even for a few hours, or even one, they would have some *job security*.

You see, my brothers and sisters, what the landowner paid the vineyard workers was, yes, the wage he promised, but what they -- and we -- could not see, because they were grasping at some perception of injustice done to them, was *job security* that day. The decline of anxiety for a few hours. The day workers could be joyous with relief and generous if they chose to be, because they knew with almost absolute certainty they would be paid at the end of the day. They had *job security*.

When you get your paycheck, Social Security or retirement check, what do you have? Security. Can you put yourself into the shoes of the men who wait at Parking lots and worry and long for a job for just one day? Or half a day, or an hour? Can you imagine their anxiety?

Most Bible scholars interpret this Gospel to mean all people deserve eternal life, that in heaven we will all be the same.

And this is true. But when you see the poor waiting throughout the day, day after day, for enough work to sustain them and their families for just another day, I think this Gospel is telling us who may have job security to be as generous as the landowner in thoughts, words and deeds. To offer job security or something like it to our neighbor. This is not a parable about justice to the day workers because the landowner paid what he promised to each worker, and it was what the worker agreed to. It is about generosity and love for that neighbor in front of us who does not have house, home, work, food for their children, and perhaps not even safety. Comfort does not even come into it.

This Sunday, Jesus asks us to be generous and to think not only of ourselves and what we think we deserve. Because in these times, it could be any one of us standing in the parking lot. Can you think of your anxiety as the drivers in their pickup trucks choose others but not you? What it would be like to be without a job even if you search for it? Maybe you have lived through this. Either way, let us be generous and share the reality of the job security we have with those who do not have it, but hope, with all their hearts.

When we reflect on God's attributes as revealed in the parable, we do not always see ourselves as the beneficiaries of such goodness. We can remain on the abstract level in our prayer. God is generous to all, but to us personally? Absolutely! How many times has he forgiven us, strengthened us, enlightened us! Which worker in the vineyard are we? Have we come early in the day to labor in his vineyard and so now expect great recompense, or do we labor with a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to serve? Do we now rejoice in God's goodness as he rewards us generously with blessings?