

Opening

Check-in & Introductions

The Good Wage

The Bible Story

Please watch the story, following the link provided. If you would like to read the story as well, the text has been provided below.

Watch the Story *(Biblical adaptations written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

Together, watch the children's story time found on Manchester Children & Families Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/178276089786532/>

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 20:1-16 (NRSV)

¹ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴ and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶ And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Wondering Questions (Part I)

"Wondering Questions" are open ended discussion questions. These are the same questions that our children are working through!

Wondering Questions for Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

1. I wonder how the workers who worked just a little while felt about the money they received?
2. I wonder how the first workers hired felt about what they received?
3. I wonder if the first workers hired said unkind things to the last workers hired?
4. I wonder if the owner was being fair?
5. I wonder about times in your life when it didn't seem fair?

Wondering Questions for Older Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

6. What do you think would have been a fair settlement for the workers in this story?
7. Have you ever had a time when someone paid you more than they were supposed to or when they gave you more than they had to? How did you feel? Good? Guilty? Did you share any of your extra?
8. We hear only the words of the grumbling first workers. Let's think about the other workers. How did they feel? Decide if they would have shared any of their money? Did they feel at all guilty?
9. How do you feel about not being able to work your way into the kingdom of God, but having it be a gift God gives you? Why then, does the Bible teach us to be fair and kind people? How should you live? Does it matter??

What’s Going On

In the Good Shepherd children’s curriculum, a section called “Teacher Helps” is provided. This section gives a deeper background to us adults Please take turns reading through this section.

Teacher Helps *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

This is a problematic story! It seems very unfair to us, most likely because we imagine how we would feel if we were the workers who had worked the longest amount of time. I have never known anyone who spoke of this parable positively because they imagined themselves to be in the position of the workers who worked the shortest amount of time. We all tend to believe that we would be the ones who would have put in the most amount of time. We cannot approach this parable as a statement about the way to treat employees or a defense of free enterprise. Rather, we must see it as a parable of grace.

The wage promised to the workers was one denarius or about twenty cents. (The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible, edited by Charles Laymon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, p.634) It was a fair wage, as that was the going rate for Palestine in the time of Jesus. When the workers who had only worked one hour were paid the same as those who had worked twelve hours, suddenly it didn't seem like such a fair wage. We can identify with those workers. So will the children. Their response will be that this was NOT fair. If you work more, you should get paid more. I doubt if many of them will say, if you work less you should get paid less. We are all very ready to accept generosity for ourselves, but we tend to have a tough time sharing it.

The owner defends his right to do what he wants with his money. He may be generous if he so chooses. He has not cheated the first workers by paying them less than he promised. No, he kept his promise and paid them just as he said. He also paid the other workers a fair wage, more than fair.

The parable reminds us of our difficulty in accepting that those who appear to be less involved in the church or less upright citizens seem to have just as good a spot in the kingdom as do those of us who have always gone to church, always attended Sunday School and always, in our minds, have done what God would have us do. However, the gift of salvation is not one based on merit. It's given freely for all who want it by the most generous gift giver of all time. The center of this parable is the generous owner, not the disgruntled employees.

The first two wondering questions deal with the feelings of the workers. Realize that although the young children will be responding to your question, they are really responding out of their own experience. This parable hits home for all ages, because we learn early on that things aren't always fair. We also learn early on to want and want and want.

In the third question we deal with how the relationship might have been between the first workers and the last workers. Some of the children may believe that the first workers will be angry with the last workers, but most of them will probably remind us that it was the owner who gave the same to everyone.

The fourth question will consider if the owner was fair. The responses to this question and the one following it about fairness and unfairness in their lives could keep you going for a long time. Decide when it's time to stop wondering.

Wondering Questions (Part II)

Wondering Questions for Adults

1. How might a child hear this story? What might this story mean to a child?
2. Are we offended by this parable because it doesn't align with what we experience in our own lives, or because it does? Are we offended because the "real world" doesn't look like this, or are we offended because it does and we know that it shouldn't?
3. In this parable we hear that everyone's work has value, no matter how long they have been doing the work. What is the work that the church has been doing for a long time? What is the newer work of the church? Do you find yourself valuing one of these more than the other?
4. Is it possible that the last laborers hired, those invited later in the day, were not yet working because there was not yet a hospitable invitation extended to them? How does this interpretation relate to the hospitality of those who claim to be in the church/reign of God?

Closing

Prayer

Dear God, we are grateful for the gifts you give. Expand our understanding of "labor" to include the work of the body in all its diverse expressions. Help us to see your invitation to share our gifts as a gift in and of itself. Help us to extend your invitation to others, knowing that each of us has something wonderful to offer as the Body of Christ at work in the world. We pray to you, in Jesus' name, in the presence of your Spirit, **Amen**.

Study Link

<https://manchestrumc.org/all-church-study/>

God calls people to work in and for the Reign of God. The gift is the invitation into that work. God wants no one to be excluded from this work.