

That's not FAIR!

20 September 2020 – Creation 2

I've always found it interesting how young children have an innate sense of justice. There's a little one who attends the daycare at Knox, that, when he isn't getting his way about something will wail like a siren and then bellow "It's not faaaaaairrrrr". When I was looking over today's gospel in the office on Tuesday I heard "It's not faaaaairrrrr" and despite my best intention, it made me laugh.

Fairness is defined as "impartial and just treatment or behaviour without favouritism or discrimination".

Based on this description, was the land-owner fair?

Let's see...it's likely in the late-Autumn and it's harvesting season. He needs labourers to get the grapes off the vines, in the vineyard. So he goes to the job centre and promises a days work for a days wage, likely about a single denarii. He needs, say, 20 labourers and gets only a half dozen first thing in the morning. He hires them for the days wage and they get to work, but he needs more labourers.

A couple of hours later, he goes out to another job centre and gets another half-dozen for a full-days wage. They head off to the vineyard, but he is still short enough labourers to get the job finished that day. The land-owner goes out a total of five times to finally get enough labourers to finish the days work.

At the end of the day the labourers line up. Had the land-owner paid the labourers in the order he hired them, there would be no story. Instead, he pays them in reverse order. So the guys who worked for an hour or two get a full-days wage. The ones he hired first thing are likely thinking they'll get more because they were hired first.

And they would be mistaken.

So, while the land-owner promised a full-days wage to everyone he hired, those he hired first are annoyed because they worked in the heat of the day and got treated the same as those who worked only an hour or two.

IT'S NOT FAIR you can hear them lamenting. And yet, the land-owner has not broken any promises.

So when the grumbling begins from the first-hired, the land-owner reminds them:
"Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?
Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you".

The first-hired labourers are outraged, not because they were paid a fair days wage, but because those who worked less time were paid the same. We can say we are all for equality, until it looks like someone is getting more than we are, for the same amount of work.

Let's go back a little bit. This story is not historically accurate. It is yet another parable.

A parable is defined as "a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels". The story today, is not about a fair days wages. It isn't about work ethic. It is about the kingdom of God. And if there's one thing we've learned over the last few months of hearing the Gospels as told by Matthew, the kingdom of God is anything but fair.

Believe it or not, this is actually great news.

You see, in order to be received into the kingdom of heaven, you simply need to be a follower of Jesus. There isn't a certain amount of time that needs to pass, or a test you need to take. To enter the kingdom of heaven, you need to give yourself to God.

There are many religious doctrines in the world that go back centuries that tell us otherwise. There are many religious scholars who are far smarter than I am, who will tell you that you must earn your way. Respectfully, I disagree. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, one must choose to follow Jesus. One must choose to live their life as Jesus lived his life.

Putting others ahead of yourself. Treating everyone kindly. Not showing favouritism. Wearing a mask. Speaking up for those who don't have a voice. Speaking out against injustice. Caring for widows and orphans. Spending time with the lonely and the sick. Etc.

When the sacrament of baptism first started to gain popularity, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, many of the faithful waited until they were on their deathbed to be baptised as it was believed that a person was the holiest and thus closest to God, on the day of their baptism.

Infant baptism became the norm in the 4th century when the debate was raging about where unbaptised infants went when they died.

So, let me ask you this...who is holier? One who is baptised as an infant or as an adult?

I don't have an answer for you. Because you see, God's redemptive love is all encompassing, and it's given to us at birth. We can baptise our children as infants, or we can wait until they choose for themselves. One is not better or holier than another. They are both blessings in the eyes of God.

The land-owner says to one of the first-hires of the day "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."

And so it is with God. God's love is the most generous love we will receive. And whether we have a relationship with God from the first moment of our life, whether we work on and nurture it throughout our lives, or choose only when facing death to enter into that relationship, God's love is perfection.

Is it fair?

Nope. Nada. Not even a little bit.

Neither are the gospels fair.

Neither is life fair.

Yet, rather than be disheartened, we need to realise that we are loved perfectly, in all our imperfection. That when we feel we have fallen in the eyes of God, we are still loved.

When we have failed in the eyes of the world, we are still loved in God's eyes.

To love and be loved by God means accepting that there are people you may not like, or may hate even, who are loved by God. A bitter pill to swallow, to be sure.

Nobody ever said that God's love was "fair".

How many of you are parents?

How many of you have children who have made decisions with which you disagreed?

How many of you have disowned your children?

How many of you have been disowned?

How many of you who have struggled with your children, have welcomed them back home again?

How many of you have ever disliked your children?

How many of you have ever stopped loving your children?

God's love **is** perfection. We are created in God's image, which is the image of perfection, but being human, we stumble and fall. We get it wrong, we make things messy and complicated, yet no matter what, we are loved.

Isn't that what perfect love is all about? Loving the unlovable?

Is that fair? No.

Nobody has ever claimed that God was fair.

Nobody has ever claimed that love is fair.

Yet God's love is absolute perfection for God's perfectly imperfect beings.

Thanks be to God!

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Creation 3 – Matthew 20.1-16