

## NAPA

Andrea and I went to Napa with some friends a few months ago. It was one of the most interesting trips I've ever taken. I know nothing about wine. For me to spend more than 14 or 15 dollars on a bottle of wine it has to be very special occasion like, oh, I don't know someone getting married or finally getting done with grad. school.

That's right, you've got a great bottle of wine headed your way from me on your wedding day or when you get done with grad school. And I'm ~~not~~ talking the cheap stuff either. The good stuff. The high end, 15 dollar stuff. Probably Yellow Tail.

Anyway, needless to say, Napa was an education for me. As we toured these vineyards, I found myself

being very interested in the obsessive attention to detail that <sup>was given to craft</sup> ~~was given to craft~~ ~~the vineyard~~ <sup>the vineyard</sup> the kind of wine <sup>the vineyard</sup> wanted.

It was much more intentional than I thought it was. The location of the vineyard, the fermenting process, the pipes, the barrels, the aging, the pairing.

I'll never look at a glass of wine the same again.

The other <sup>thing</sup> ~~thing~~ I learned in Napa was that grapes, even today are picked by hand. ~~is just a way of saying~~ <sup>and</sup> But as we <sup>the</sup> ~~drove through~~ <sup>drove through</sup> Napa Valley to our destinations, we'd see <sup>the</sup> ~~workers~~ <sup>workers</sup> in bunches, dotting the rows of vines, picking grapes.

~~It~~ <sup>But</sup> it was beautiful to see from a distance, I was very glad to be in the air conditioned rental ~~car~~ <sup>car, watching</sup> as a spectator. It looked like very hard ~~work~~ <sup>work.</sup>

Wine, at least the grape harvesting part isn't much different now than it was in Bible times. Though the processing and the juicing and fermenting is more mechanical and industrial than it once was, the harvesting is the same.

<sup>And</sup> This is where our story today becomes easier to understand.

**We have a man who owns an estate, and on that estate is a vineyard.** The time for harvest has come. He's not wanting to hire people that will work for him year round, because harvest time is only a seasonal thing. He's wanting to hire some seasonal workers to get the

grapes off of the vines at the right time so he can make wine.

He goes into the town, sees some men standing around, and offers them jobs. They agree on a daily wage and sign on and head out to the vineyard.

He does the same thing at noon, and again at 3, and again at 5.

Here's what's odd, though. At the end of the day he pays the all the workers the same wage. They agreed on a daily wage when he hired them, and regardless of the time of day that each worker started they all got the same pay.

Now, seeing this with my own eyes in Napa. Knowing what was involved. These massive vineyards being

picked by hand in the hot sun, labor being fully manual. No assistance from animals or machines. This would make me very angry if someone who started at 5 in the afternoon, finishing at 6 or 7 got the same pay for the day that I did when I started at 8 o'clock that morning.

That's poor management. Someone in payroll or HR needs to be fired. That's waste. That's cheating people. That's unfair. There's no way around it. It just is.

*BUT*  
 Here's our dilemma as Christians. Read the opening line of the parable.

1-2 "God's kingdom is like an estate manager who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard."

This story is an illustration about how the Kingdom of God works. And I'll be plain with you today. I don't like that. *Is this a story about poor management?* waste? *Is this a story about cheating people?* *The estate manager seems to be* unfair. There's no way around it. *He* just is.

Or is ~~he~~ *he*?

## WHAT KIND OF A WORLD DO YOU WANT?

C.S. Lewis talks a bit about one side of this "fairness" equation in bit he <sup>WROTE</sup> s called, "Right and Wrong As A Clue To The Meaning of the Universe." If you would like your head to spin, I would suggest picking up a copy this week and reading it.



He writes this inside of one of the chapters,

Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kind of things they say.

They say things like this:

"How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?"

"That's my seat, I was there first"

"Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm"

"Why should you shove in first?"

"Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine"

"Come on, you promised."

People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the ~~man~~ <sup>man</sup> who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behavior does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: "To hell with your standard."

Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. He pretends there is some special reason in this particular case why the person who took the seat first should not keep it, or that things were quite different when he was given the bit of orange, or that something has turned up which lets him off keeping his promise.

*You and I are like these workers on this vineyard for our story.*

The truth is that we want a world that operates according to a fixed state of rules and laws... that is until those laws no longer work in our favor.

*And here's what's hard. God's Kingdom doesn't work according to our ever ~~relative~~ <sup>changing</sup> moods of ~~being~~ <sup>fairness</sup>!*

The Kingdom of God, according to human standards is unfair. The Kingdom of God is a place where the top is often bottom, where ~~the~~ <sup>are</sup> weakness is often strength, and first ~~is~~ <sup>are</sup> often last.

6 "Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first."

Let me ask you some very direct questions, and I'm not using hyperbole to make a point either, I'm being serious this morning.

Do you really want to live in a world that is fair, all the time? Really?

Do you really want to live in a world where everyone gets exactly what they deserve, all of the time? Really?

Do you really want to live in a world where everyone is equal, all of the time? Really?

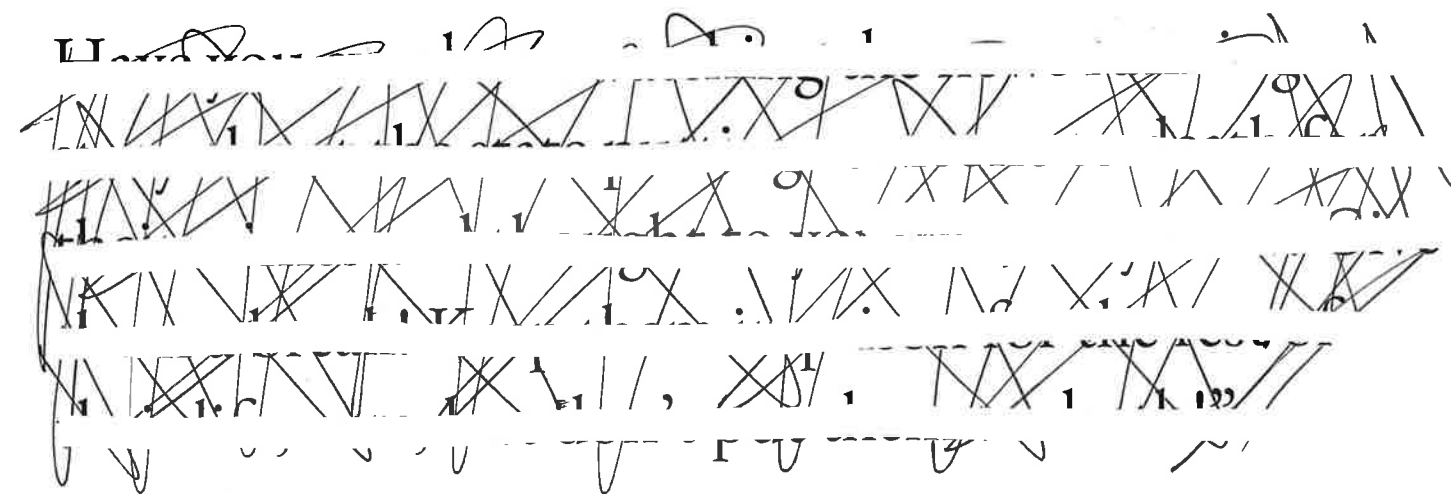
Do you really want to live in a world where everyone is treated exactly the same, all of the time? Really?

Sure you do. As long as when it comes to you being treated those ways the powers that be make an exception ~~for you~~. *from time to time.*

Don't agree with me?

Have you ever asked a police officer to give you a break on a speeding ticket?

Have you ever asked a professor for a few extra points on a test so you can get a higher letter grade?



Have you ever judged anyone for anything you yourself have been guilty of? Never? Really?

Have you ever looked at someone who is suffering in poverty and had thoughts like, they're getting what they deserve! They're an able bodied person. They <sup>Certainly</sup> ~~could~~ work and ~~make~~ <sup>! somewhere making</sup> a living doing something!

We all want a world that operates according to our version of fairness and justice, and yet here Jesus is

~~When we have thoughts like this, we are illustrating how we believe at a very core level that fairness, and equality, and equal treatment of everyone in every instance comes with lots of exceptions.~~

illustrating that this is not the way that God's Kingdom works.

Does that disturb you? Great. It should.

Does that comfort you? Great. It should.

Here is truth this morning, church. **The God to whom we lift our hands and sing our songs and whisper our prayers to, the ground of being, the foundation, the undercurrent of our lives is (according to human standards) very unfair.**

His Kingdom is not fair. Why? Because it is good.

God's Kingdom is a Kingdom whose very fabric is grace. Disturbing, bothersome, non-computing, imbalanced, unfair grace, where people get things they

don't deserve and people who deserve things don't get them.

And thinking this way is a great reversal of sorts for us who <sup>like the "early workers"</sup> can only see out faith through a the lens

~~of the Kingdom of God~~  
~~being more deserving because of~~  
~~our diligent work.~~

~~But things are about the management of men's~~  
~~Kingdom is something other. Something~~

~~better~~  
e. Something more fundamental.

The Episcopal priest, Robert Capon, native of Queens who served in Suffolk County New York for most of his career, wrote this...



“My life is a witness to vulgar grace—a grace that amazes as it offends. A grace that pays the eager beaver who works all day long the same wages as the grinning drunk who shows up at ten till five. A grace that hikes up the robe and runs breakneck toward the prodigal reeking of sin and wraps him up and decides to throw a party no ifs, ands, or buts. / A grace that raises bloodshot eyes to a dying thief's request—“Please remember me”—and assures him, “You bet!” / A grace that is the pleasure of the Father, fleshed out in the carpenter Messiah, Jesus the Christ, who left His Father's side not for heaven's sake but for our sakes, yours and mine. This vulgar grace is indiscriminate compassion. It works without asking anything of us. It's not cheap. It's free, and as such will always be a banana peel for the orthodox foot and a fairy tale for the grown-up sensibility.”

- Robert Capon

It's interesting. As I age in my own faith, I think I can have the tendency to live too much in the present or the future, and I think that God is often wanting me to remember my past.

It can be very easy for me to forget where I was when Christ found me, <sup>very</sup> in late in the day, standing ~~around~~ <sup>in</sup> the ~~down~~ <sup>town</sup> square disengaged, without anything to live for.

The scriptures are ever teaching us to remember where we've come from. Because when we forget where we've



come from, internally that often turns into pride and comparison, Our faith becomes rigid and dry.

*and God must quickly*

I don't know why that is, but it's true. And I see this work itself out in long cycles <sup>very</sup> ~~throughout~~ <sup>in</sup> my life. The times where I am at my best as a husband, a Dad, a friend, a person of faith, a "worker" like the guys in this story is when I remember that Christ came and got me, I was late to getting to the Master's Vineyard and yet he treated me the same as all of the people who had been there from the very beginning.

And when I remember that, I don't get upset or jealous when I see God treating someone better than their actions deserve. In fact, I long to be a player in that exchange of grace, because it is the most beautiful thing a human being can experience.

A life wasted, being restored by God, without having to earn it back with work.

~~And then?~~

What a great reversal it is to take deeply to heart that this is the true Kingdom of God.

Forgive me for being so plain this morning ~~but~~ if your walk with really God sucks right-- if your relationships are in turmoil-- if you feel spiritually dry or lost ~~this~~ <sup>COULD THIS POSSIBLY BE</sup> ~~might~~ be one of the reasons why?

*Could you be*

~~Maybe you are~~ dwelling too much on the failures or even the achievements of the present? The hard work you've done and all that you feel you deserve credit for? <sup>It's that what's</sup> ~~will always~~ lead you to places of regret, comparison, anger, and jealousy, <sup>Such familiar</sup>

*all the time?*

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*and judgment quite*

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*all the time?*

Maybe what you are in need of most is to remember your past, where the Master found you in the village, and took you home, and just savor for a second that you are <sup>picture</sup> ~~alive~~ yourself, a picture of grace. Not achievement. You are here. You are present. And God is madly in love with you, wanting you to lose yourself in fields <sup>the</sup> of ~~grace~~.

**The acceptance of immediate grace is the doorway to all that God has for your life.**

This is the great reversal.

Let's pray.

Almighty God, as we've listened to the words of Jesus today, thank you for comforting us.

Thank you for confounding us.

As we live, and work, and play, and worship, and discern your next steps for our lives would you ground us where we are in need of grounding.

Would you also pull the ground out from beneath us when we reach spots in human life where we get into legalistic ruts and are in need of a re-awakening.

Give us ears to hear and eyes to see what your Spirit would have for us in our lives.

Amen