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### GOD ISN'T FAIR

When my two brothers and I were kids, we could be pretty competitive with each other as siblings sometimes are.

- We would always keep track of who was getting the better deal:
  - who got the biggest serving of dessert;
  - who got to do something special first;
  - who seemed to be getting the favored treatment from our parents.
- And whenever one of us thought another was getting a better situation, we would quickly call on our folks to remedy this great unfairness.
  - “Mom, how come he got the biggest piece of cake?”
  - “Dad, he got to go first last time.”
  - “Why does he get to and I don’t?”
- Now my parents weren’t about to buy into our little battles.
  - They weren’t about to keep track of every little benefit that one got over the other two.
    - So, whenever one of us would raise the lament, “Why did he get more than I did?” they would calmly tell the one complaining, “It’s because we love him more than you.”
- Of course, this was not really true and my brothers and I knew that.
  - My parents loved each of us equally, and that response was just their way of telling us how silly our complaints really were.
    - And let’s face it. My brothers never should have complained when they saw me getting the better deal.
      - After all, I am the oldest brother and of course I deserved more than they did.
        - It was only unfair when I didn’t get the most!

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Is there any emotion more basic to our natures than that of the jealousy of another’s gain?

- Is there any emotion more deadly?

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Some years ago, I read about a man in Milwaukee who shot and killed his girlfriend who was living with the man *and* his wife.

- The reason for the murder?
  - The man had become jealous because his girlfriend was cheating on him.

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Jealousy over the gain of another.

- Certainly, that was in part the reason for Iraq’s invasion in to Kuwait in the early 90’s. Iraq envied how much oil Kuwait has.
- It doesn’t matter that Iraq had their own oil.
  - Kuwait, a smaller country, has more oil, and that’s not fair.

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Today’s gospel is a wonderful display of the unfairness and the generosity of GOD.

- *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.”*
- Some laborers were hired at six a.m., some at nine, some at noon, more at three, and still other, just an hour before quitting time.
  - At the end of the day, when the wages were distributed, all the workers were paid for a full day’s labor, including those who had worked for just one hour.
    - And those who had worked all day were furious.
      - It just wasn’t fair.

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The same envy is displayed by the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son.

- “It isn’t fair that my younger brother should receive a welcome like this when I have stayed home all these years in my father’s house and I have never received a party like this one!”

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The troubling thing in both these parables is that JESUS seems to be telling us that GOD isn’t fair.

- That’s the part we don’t like.
  - Why should someone who has been less faithful to GOD than we believe we have—why should they receive equal or even greater blessings from GOD?
    - GOD just isn’t following the rules.
    - And we may even find ourselves crying out, “GOD isn’t fair!”

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But that’s what I mean about human nature.

- We see people all around us—people we find unworthy of GOD’S favor because of the lives they have led.
  - Yet many of them seem to receive all the same benefits we do even though we have been the faithful followers of CHRIST.
    - In fact, too often they seem to receive better than we ourselves get.
    - And that isn’t fair.

How dare GOD bless those who live immoral lives!

- How dare GOD look with favor upon those who don’t even come close to honoring GOD’S name or GOD’S day!
- How dare GOD tell us that we have to love and forgive those whose only concern in life seems to be themselves!
  - Yet right here in the gospel, that is what JESUS is telling us.
    - JESUS is telling us that GOD isn’t fair.

Those who worked in the vineyard for long hours would not have been dissatisfied at all with what they had received if they had not compared it to what the others had received.

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The motion picture, “AMADEUS”, tells the story of the adult life of the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

- The central figure in this movie is a composer called Antonio Salieri who lived at the same time as Mozart.

Salieri has devoted his life to music.

- Indeed, early in life, Salieri made a promise to GOD that he would give his entire life to GOD if GOD would simply allow him to write beautiful music.
- Salieri’s prayer is answered.
  - He writes wonderful compositions and becomes the director of the Italian opera under Emperor Joseph II in Vienna.

One day, though, he hears the music of Mozart, an obnoxious, irreverent, childish man.

- Salieri recognizes that Mozart’s musical gifts are far superior to his own.
- And something happens to Salieri.
  - He becomes obsessed with destroying Mozart.
  - He even complains to GOD, believing that GOD is mocking him through Mozart—though GOD has answered all his prayers.

The end of the movie is a tragic portrayal of the power of envy to destroy a person once he or she begins to compare personal gifts with others.

- As a cynic has put it, “It’s not enough to succeed. Our friends must fail as well.”

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What is there within us that causes us to measure our lives, not on the basis of what we have received, but rather on the basis of what we have received compared to others?

- Why can we not be satisfied with what GOD has given us, without having to look at what others have?

Unfortunately, we miss some of the key points of today's parable.

First, we need to realize that each of the workers receives exactly what they were promised.

- Those who worked all day were not given any less than what they had agreed to.
  - And, it is entirely up to GOD to decide what to give to each person, and not the decision of those who serve GOD.

Second, we should take note that JESUS is not talking about the material rewards of this life.

- Rather, when HE talks about the wage given to the workers, HE is talking about GOD'S Kingdom and the blessings that GOD bestows on those who come to faith.
  - It matters not whether that person has believed all her or his entire life, or just at the end of life.
    - The eternal blessings of GOD come to all who believe, whenever they believe, and as GOD alone sees fit to give them.

Should we not be happy and rejoice whenever another comes to faith and receives what GOD has to offer?

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Buck O'Neil, a very successful player in the negro baseball leagues tells how happy he was when Jackie Robison became the first black ball player in the major leagues.

- "We were thrilled," he said. "We were so happy. We knew it was the end of the black baseball leagues, but we didn't care. Sure, there were a lot of guys who had played hard all their lives and never had that chance. But when one of us succeeded, we all succeeded. And we were happy."

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Why can't we be happy when another makes it—when another comes to faith.

- We are Christians who, hopefully, have worked hard all our lives in the service of our LORD.
- I'm sure, for most of us, we have truly earned the blessings of the ALMIGHTY for our faithful service.
  - Still, it may infuriate us to know that others who have not been the servants we imagine ourselves to be, will receive the same reward.
    - GOD isn't fair.

Yet if you think about it, it is that very attitude that makes us unworthy to receive GOD'S blessing.

- Our jealousy, our bitterness, our desire to get even makes us far less deserving than those over whom we sit in judgment.
  - When it comes right down to it, perhaps it is we who are ones who are getting the good deal from GOD.

The truth of today's gospel is that GOD *isn't* fair—by our standards.

- But when it comes right down to it, for each of us who, if we're honest fall way short of what GOD expects, that's really good news.