

Michael Cheuk Sermon Outline – September 24

“Gracious Generosity” - Matthew 20:1-16 NRS (The Parable of the Laborers)

Anne Mattos-Leedom wrote an article for beliefnet.com called “Getting Over the ‘It’s Not Fair’ Syndrome.” She lists ten things to get over the “It’s Not Fair” syndrome, and I want to highlight four of them in light of Jesus’ parable this morning.¹

The first step to get over the “It’s Not Fair” syndrome is to Reflect on the Truth. Mattos-Leedom writes: “Take a hard look at your circumstances that seem so unfair and ask yourself the hard questions about what you did do or not do, that might have increased the chances of this happening to you.”

The second step is to Stop Comparing. “We choose for ourselves what seems fair by comparing our lives and circumstances to those of others around us. Resolve to evaluate your life based only on what you want for yourself and not based on what others seem to have.”

The third step is to Give Up on Control. “The sense of ‘it’s not fair’ often comes from the need to control things in our life that we simply do not have ultimate control over. Develop a healthy balance between giving things your best effort and then understanding ultimately it is out of your control. Put your efforts into the process but learn to let go of the need to control the outcome.”

The fourth step is to Redefine the Concept of Fair. “Often we look to a divine power to be completely and totally responsible for our lives. ... [But] our lives are a team effort with the divine. Our part is to do the best we can and then to see past the moment into the bigger picture and knowing that ultimately what happens is part of that purpose. That is where faith comes in.”

The deeper questions regarding the “It’s Not Fair” syndrome: “What is my place in your kingdom, Jesus? How much do I matter in your eyes?” “Lord, do I matter as much as those laborers who were hired at the last hour?” “Lord, do I matter ... in this church, in this family?”

Jesus didn’t tell this parable to teach us about wage equity or economic justice. Jesus told this parable to teach us something about *God* and God’s kingdom. The theologian Martin Luther believed that the heart of this parable is indeed “that God does not want to deal with us according to work, according to our deserving, but according to grace.”²

As St. Augustine once said, “That denarius, that day’s wages, is life eternal, and in the life eternal all will be equal.”³ I hope that’s good news for all!

Today, as we celebrate the 62nd anniversary of Peakland Baptist Church, we give thanks to God for the laborers who came before us. A group from First Baptist Lynchburg responded to the gracious call of God to labor in the fields of the western suburbs of Lynchburg, out in the boonies off of Boonsboro Rd. In September 24, 1955, Peakland Baptist Church was founded, and for the first six months, the church was led solely by its members. From its very beginning, this church has emphasized the importance of lay people owning the ministry. Built into this congregation’s DNA is a sense that the work of the church should not be solely delegated to paid clergy. From its beginning, members of this church reached out to their neighbors and welcomed people of different denominations – Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, and said, “There’s nothing you need to leave behind in order to have a place in this church.” (You don’t have to earn your way into this church.) This church also said, “You matter to us, and we want you to bring the best of your traditions and religious experience to enrich this church.” Those first laborers of Peakland Baptist embraced subsequent laborers and the church thrived. Today, we are still the recipients of the gracious generosity of those who came before us. What a wonderful legacy to celebrate!

On this day, we don’t just celebrate the past. We also look toward the future. I believe the city of Lynchburg needs a Baptist church that is ecumenically welcoming, intellectually curious, spiritually warm, and compassionately active in this community. I believe that God continues to call new laborers here to join in God’s work. And I pray that long time laborers of this church will embrace the gracious generosity that our Lord wants to shower upon these new laborers. Together, may Peakland Baptist continue to be a channel of God’s gracious generosity for the next 62 years and beyond!

¹ <http://www.beliefnet.com/Inspiration/2010/06/Getting-Over-the-Its-Not-Fair-Syndrome.aspx>.

² Cited in Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 2, The Churchbook*. Revised and Expanded Edition (2004), p. 320.

³ Augustine, *Sermons*, 37(97):6:375, www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf106.vii.xxxix.html.