

- God is not fair.
 - I know that I sound like a petulant 2 year old when I say that but I feel the need to express it.
 - Ever since I was young, I have known the value of working hard. My father made it clear to me and to my 2 brothers and sister that if we wanted something bad enough, we would have to work for it. And if we worked hard enough for it we could achieve whatever I set my mind to.
 - And my experience told me he was right. I was not a popular kid to whom things came easily but I was blessed with at least some brains, so putting in the time, showing extra effort, working hard became a way of operating.
 - And it worked. I did well in school and then in college. Then I got a job, and, applying the same techniques, in under three years, I was managing the department.
 - That's why I know full well, that I would be one of those grumbling at payday, looking for more because I had "done more." It's why I identify with the older brother in the story of the Forgiving Father – also known as the story of the Prodigal Son. He had put in the time, he had worked hard and now his brother gets the party.
 - God's not fair and what's more? Jesus calls us to rejoice in God's generosity for the other, the one who has done less and still gets the goods.
- This is especially poignant following last week's Gospel. Remember last week's Gospel?
 - Jesus told us about a servant ensnared by the downward spiral of debt. Some of you may know what that's like. You feel hemmed in on all sides. Avoiding contact with anyone.

- Suddenly, though, the king forgives the debt giving the man an unexpected, unmerited reprieve. The oppressing obligation has been lifted. The possibilities suddenly seemed endless for him.
- And if that were the end of the story, it would have been a happy one. But it didn't end there. The man turned around and, rather than rejoicing in the king's generosity, attacked another who owed a fraction of what he himself had owed.
- Before we're quick to condemn him: perhaps he was afraid of falling into debt again, perhaps he wanted to make sure that it never happened again and gather up what he could.
- But Jesus minces no words, both in the parable and in his commentary following: *You wicked servant! I forgave your entire debt because you begged me. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had on you? Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers to pay back the whole debt.* Then, Jesus being the good Teacher, wants to make absolutely sure that no one misses the point. So He adds: *So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.*
- Jesus promises a violent end to that man and to all who are like him in refusing to forgive his (or her) brother (or sister) from the heart.
- And this week, Jesus uses a different image to offer the same point: God's generosity to us calls us in turn to be generous to others. Jesus reminds us: the very love and forgiveness we asked for from God just moments ago in our penitential rite, is precisely what we are called to share every day with others.
 - What's the only time Jesus gets mad? When does the king from last week's Gospel go from generous benefactor to angry overlord?

- It's when the one to whom God has been generous refuses to share that generosity with others.
- This sharing is what it means to work in the vineyard.
 - Jesus calls us to exercise the Father's generosity in the love we show, in the way we reach out, in the way we serve, in the way we forgive, in the way we rejoice in the other's good, put the other's good ahead of our own, discern God's will before ours.
 - Working in the vineyard is just another expression for making disciples, of taking what the Father has provided and then using that to bear fruit for God, building up the kingdom.
 - That fruit is the way others come to know God, come to perceive God's presence, the way they know God cares for them because we care for them as a sister and brother.
 - More than that, working in the vineyard is a privilege, helping God to help us and others on the way to salvation.
- Our salvation comes precisely in our experiencing God's love and mercy and then, inviting others to do the same, not just at the end of life but right here, right now.
 - The word salvation has interesting roots in the original Hebrew. Etymologically it denotes a wide open space, but it also points to a 'broadening' or 'enlarging,' a creating of an even larger space.
 - Our salvation is, roughly speaking, a space for God inside our hearts and our lives, about God broadening that space, creating a wide open space in us to see and to know ever more God's presence in that space, and about our working with God to broaden the space in our world for God.

- Jesus came to offer (and to make possible!): an experience of the Father's love and mercy and the freedom for us to share that with others.
 - This offer and the freedom it brings is borne of the love God has for us, the delight God takes in us and is sustained by the redemption Christ offer us.
 - In this freedom, we see and know the whole Christian life, the joy and the challenge of being a follower of Jesus Christ
 - This freedom is what allows us to work in the vineyard.
- Working in the vineyard is about how we make use of the freedom offered by Christ's Passion and Death, about how we chose do what God asks of us, about how we work with God to share with others the salvation that God gives to us.
 - It's not something we can ignore or put off. Remember, Jesus promised a violent end to any and all who refuse.
 - To work in the vineyard means recognizing with joy the opportunity God gives us, the privilege of serving with God, of seeing all of my thoughts and all of my words and all of my actions as part of God's plan for salvation, for myself and for the other.
 - To work in the vineyard means creating a space for God to be present for me and for the others. It means enlarging my small mindedness and softening my hard heartedness that I might rejoice even more in offering the same to others.
 - It's hard, backbreaking work, challenging me day in, day out. And I often fail, get worn out, tired of being the bigger person, of being the one who gets less after working more. I get tired

of trying to live up to the conduct Saint Paul calls me to, conduct worthy of the Gospel

- And therein lies the challenge of my interpretation of today's Gospel.
 - I may classify **myself** as one of the harder workers and perhaps that's true. Out of humility, of course I would never deign to put myself in the first group, nor even the second. But surely the third and certainly far ahead of all who come in at last moment.
 - At the very least, **I** work harder than **they!** Meaning, at least in my mind, I deserve more than they do.
 - Remember Isaiah in today's first reading, though? God's ways are not mine, God's ways are different, higher than mine.
 - Jesus came promising and offering God's mercy to anyone and to everyone: to the woman caught in adultery and to the tax collector, both public, profligate sinners. He met with people in private and He sought out those relegated to the margins, bringing forgiveness to each one.
 - No strings attached save one: to rejoice and share the forgiveness God had offered.
 - Jesus reminds us of God's way, of the standard God uses in offering reward. **That** classification comes in what I do with the love and mercy God has squandered on me, how I share it, how I create wide-open spaces in the lives of others and in the world around me, how I share what I get so freely from God.
 - According to God's standards then, because of the smallness of my mind and the hardness of my heart, even if I do the work, put in some effort, I may not even be considered in the last group who squeak in at eleventh hour.

- And it's no ordinary pay day I miss out on, but the salvation offered to those God considers worthy. That's the rub when I use my standards to judge the others God has sent into the vineyard with me or worse yet, to judge another unworthy of salvation.
- And that's why the prophet Isaiah reminds us in our first reading to look for God while He may be found, to put my thoughts and my ways behind God's, to turn back to the Lord and to go into the vineyard, recognizing how God sustains me, how God magnifies my efforts, remembering that God forgives and strengthens me, the wide open space God has created for me, even and especially when I don't deserve it, when it's not fair.
- God is not fair. Thanks be to God