

Ann Bonner-Stewart
Saint Mary's Episcopal Church, Newton Lower Falls, MA
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Imagine you work. You come in right on time, if not early.

You work all day, taking only the shortest of breaks.

At the end of the day, you're tired.

The day was long, and the work was hard.

Yet you feel good about the work you've done.

And you know you're going to be paid the standard daily rate— the denarius.

You know you're getting it b/c you verbally agreed to it early this morning.

You're with other workers waiting to receive their daily wage,

People came in at a variety of times, for some unclear reason.

You overhear another person getting paid.

And she was just hired. Like, JUST hired.

As in, she was hired an hour ago.

Though you know she was waiting to work all day,

the God's honest truth is, she did not do much at all, not compared to you.

I mean, she didn't have the time. Of course you did more.

Your ears perk up when you realize **she** is being paid

The standard daily rate, the wage you agreed to.

NOW you start to get excited b/c you realize that you must be getting paid more.

So you start making plans about what to do

Maybe you'll go out to dinner

Maybe you'll get that purse/game/watch/guitar/book set

You've had an eye on for awhile now.

You're gotten so lost inside your own head planning to do what your money
that you almost miss being called up to receive your wage.

Almost. You bound up, with a spring in your step, you put out your hand
– and you receive the standard daily wage, as originally promised.

Your face falls. Your heart sinks.

How can this be? How is this fair?

You start to grumble and moan saying,

“These latecomers are being paid

Equal to me, even though

I worked all day long!”

If you're a little weirded out by this Gospel,

if this Gospel makes you a little uncomfortable

then that means you've been listening.

It goes against many things that many of us have been taught

Maybe not sat down and taught deliberately

But implicitly which can be just as powerful

That everything will be okay if we work really hard

That God, who is merciful and loving and just and generous, must also be fair

Today's parable reminds us that God focuses on different things than we do.

God values mercy and grace over even fairness.

God prioritizes generosity and grace even more than equality.

I can't believe I'm saying this.

Because – because– equality does not have to mean bringing everyone up.

Equality here does not have to mean paying everyone the daily wage.

Being equal here could mean paying everyone for **one** hour's of work,

The lowest common denominator.

Equality could easily become that Kurt Vonnegut short story "Harrison Bergeron",
where the government enforces complete and total equality.

But instead of everyone being raised up to new, higher level
everyone is brought down to the lowest level.

Some folks must wear physical and mental devices.

Smart folks wear earpieces that blast
awful, disruptive noises to stop them
from thinking deeply.

Strong people carry heavy scrap metal, and attractive folks wear ugly masks.

I mean, THAT'S equal. Right?

No one's actually mad that **some** people get paid medical leave for months when needed.

What they're mad about is that they or their loved ones didn't get paid medical leave when they needed it just as much—

Maybe more, who's to say. .

And yet the answer is not to make everything equal by taking away everyone's paid medical leave...

though there wouldn't be much to take...

We look over the shoulders of others to see what they are getting and how it compares to what we have because it's human nature.

And right now EVERYTHING seems limited.

And inequality **is** off the charts

With the wealthiest 1% own 30% of all US wealth—the same percentage as the bottom 90%.

A huge gap between socioeconomic classes creates instability.

That's not a political statement. That's just a fact.

That's the water we swim in at the moment.

Last week, Jesus told a hyperbolic story underscoring how absurd God's mercy is,
And how we are to practice acts of mercy no matter the size.

This week, God's generosity is ludicrous.

God doesn't have some limited store of generosity
somewhere that is going to one day run out or expire.

There is no waiting list, no sold out, no if I give you some,
I can't give someone else some.

God's generosity has no shelf life.

God's generosity does not play by human rules.

Thank God.

Towards the end of the parable today, the owner says, "Take your pay and go."

The owner tells these folks to manage their own feelings.

You created this assumption, the owner says

Almost out of nowhere.

Now **you** have to own how you feel about it.

Doing our own inner work

It's hard to tell when it's working

It's tiring and tiresome and too abstract

Even so, I wonder what it might be like to take a little time to pray about,
to meditate on, to examine our own expectations at some point this week
And consider which ones might be resentments in advance
And ask God to help us.
If we want to help change our community,
If want to a small but real difference in our world,
Sometimes we have to look at what we have
In our own heads
And think about how we might be
getting in our own way
Amen.