

Lectionary 25 A 2020

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

September 20, 2020

Matthew 20:1-16; Jonah 3:10--4:11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

I am considering applying for a job at Facebook. Facebook gives its employees a minimum of 21 days of vacation time. You *start* at Facebook with three weeks of vacation, and go up from there. As for sick time, if you get sick, you have unlimited sick time at Facebook. But wait, there's more. If a member of your family gets sick, and you work for Facebook, you get another 30 days off to take care of that sick family member. That was all before Covid hit. But it's pretty good. I'm putting in an application tomorrow morning.

Then when Covid hit, they sent most of their employees home. Work from home. So every employee got an extra \$1,000 to buy a new webcam or microphone or whatever they needed to work at home. And then, because people couldn't come to work, in terms of bonuses, everybody got a bonus based on "very good" job performance. So even if you were only mediocre in your job performance, you got a bonus based on a very good job performance.

And then, if you had an aging parent whose care facility closed, or if you had a kid whose school closed, or if you had a kid whose daycare facility closed, you got another ten weeks of paid time off. To take care of the kids. Or to take care of Mom and Dad. And Facebook's new Covid policies for employees were imitated by Microsoft and Google..

Does this sound generous to you? It sounds generous to me. I have better employee benefits than many of the people that I serve as a pastor. But my good benefits are not half of what Facebook provides to its lowest level employees. And yet, there has been a backlash at Facebook and some of these other Silicon Valley companies. And you know where those grievances and complaints and allegations of unfairness are coming from? The unmarried employees. The employees without children. And get this. Facebook had to shut down some online employee discussion groups because the single Facebook employees were naming names about the employees with children' who weren't pulling their weight. Isn't that amazing? Vladimir Putin and his Russian agents have *carte blanche* to interfere in our elections using Facebook. But if the single employees of Facebook feel cheated by the employees with children, Facebook shuts that down immediately.

I don't know if you were listening carefully to our gospel reading. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Some work a long day, some work a short day; they all get paid the same. It's not fair. And the people who worked more hours complain. And the employer says, basically, you

got a fair wage. And these other people worked less, and I paid them the same. But it's my vineyard. It's my call. You're lucky to even have a job.

When Jesus talks about a vineyard— when the Bible talks about a vineyard— that vineyard usually is a symbol that stands for the work that God is doing in the world. Frequently Jesus calls it the kingdom of God. It's God's work. It's what God is up to in the world. It's God's mission. I like to call it God's enterprise. But the vineyard is an Old Testament symbol, and Jesus being a Jew who was talking to other Jews, he leaned in on this metaphor.

There are other organic metaphors for what God is doing. Yeast making bread rise. Salt giving flavor to food. Wheat growing in a field. Mustard seeds growing into bushes. But grapevines are a favorite symbol. There are so many great things about grapevines and grapes and grape harvesting. Particularly what ends up in a glass.

So the vineyard is what God is up to in the world. And we are invited to join God in that work, that mission, that enterprise. (It can be challenging to discern that enterprise. Although it's probably a lot easier than people think.) And I think that when God chose Abraham, and chose the descendants of Abraham to be his special people, I think God envisioned that we would be his partners in that enterprise. That we would be passionate about the things that he is passionate about. That we would care about the things that he cares about.

But in organized religion, we lose sight of the enterprise. We think that God is "*making a list, checking it twice, gonna find out whose naughty or nice.*" We tend to get focused on our stocking hung by the chimney. We fret about our personal reward, or our personal punishment. In today's gospel, Jesus tells this parable to shock us out of that self-centered stupor. This isn't really about what we get paid. It's about what God is up to. And can we appreciate that enterprise, can we embrace that mission, without making it all about us?

I nominate Jonah to be the best book of the Bible. For so many reasons. The book of Jonah ends with God saying these words: *And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?*" That's the conclusion. It's a marvelous book of the Bible. *THAT'S* the conclusion. There are 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left. There are 120,000 people who are idiots. There are 120,000 people who are dimwits. And a bunch of cows. And I care about those dimwits and those animals. That's the conclusion of Jonah. I care about those 120,000 dimwits and the animals that live with the dimwits.

And don't you care? When I think about Facebook, I'm thinking about the children of those employees. The children are not employees. They are not part of the corporation's profits. And the employees who don't have kids are asking, "What's in it for me?" Well, nothing's in it for you. You are doing pretty good, compared to most Americans. You're blessed. You've got a job, and a good salary, and good benefits. And Facebook is doing something for these children

of employees. They're not your children. But don't they matter? And Facebook is not a righteous community, at least in my book. Some people would call Facebook evil, just as everyone in the Bible would have called Nineveh evil. But God cares about those 120,000 dimwits and their animals. Can't you see that? Can't you at least play along? That's the question that God asks Jonah. Who, by the way, seems like dimwit, and acts like a coward and a narcissistic jerk. But God still cares for Jonah.

God cares about you. God cares about me. But he's got a whole world full of people, a whole cosmos of animals and plants and glaciers and planets and galaxies. He cares about them, too. And in today's scriptures, God is expressing his hope that we will care, too. He's got a big vineyard. With a lot of grapes. And he's eagerly inviting us to join the enterprise. It's not just about our reward, and how much we get paid. It's about something bigger. And he wants us to see that. And to join him because we see, and care, and hope. What an amazing God. What an amazing invitation for you and for me. Amen.