

Each of us has our own point of view. And, of course, that point of view originates from within each of us. So if we're anxious or angry, heartsick or harassed, that will impact how we see things. Everything can look like doom and gloom when we're feeling down. And we know how easy it is to whine and complain when we're hungry, tired, or unsure about what the future holds for us. That's why it's not hard for us to understand why the Israelites' became so disgruntled and stressed out six weeks into their exodus journey from Egypt. They'd left the oasis of Elim and entered the wilderness. How long were they going to be out here? What were they going to live on in this wilderness? Would there be anything for their flocks to graze on? What was going to become of them? Why didn't God just let them die in comfort in Egypt where there was plenty to eat?! Why did Moses and Aaron have to drag them way the heck out to the middle of nowhere so they could starve to death?!

The Israelite people were carping at Moses and Aaron – but it was God who heard and responded to their complaints by letting them first draw near so they could see the Glory of God present with them. Then God sent the flock of quail to them that evening so they could eat meat. And in the morning God rained down bread like they had never seen before. God provided enough for everyone to eat. No more, and no less. Enough.

In our heads that sounds like an excellent response, doesn't it? Because God has heard them, and is present with them, everyone will receive enough to eat. Wouldn't that settle folks down and reassure them that they will survive breaking away from Egypt? I mean, didn't the founding fathers of our country also try to reassure people that they would survive breaking away from England, and that in the United States of America there would be liberty and justice for all? People just need to be encouraged to make it through one day at a time so they can move forward together into a new life.

But there a couple things here that we struggle with: one is agreeing on what is “enough,” the other is being OK with having exactly what everyone else has. Our struggle is rooted in our individual point of view. Our “I” view starts with me, myself, and I. And the “I” view usually wants to see *more* than “enough” for me. And while we can (if we HAVE to) acknowledge that x-amount could indeed be “enough,” we'd still feel better if we had a little cushion, if we could just have a little *more* than “enough.” . . . We might also think that we **should** have *more* than other people do, maybe because we think there's some valid reason for us to have *more*. But most of the time I think we're just uncomfortable if we only have what everyone else has. Because deep in our heart of hearts, we're sure that we're SPECIAL, and darn it, we're NOT like everybody else! We shouldn't be treated like everyone else! . . . Which takes us back to our struggle with wanting *more* than “enough” – because we want to have *more* than anyone else.

It can also lead us to Jesus' parable from the Gospel of Matthew. Our individual point of view can really skew how we hear Jesus' description of God's kingdom being like an estate manager who hired workers for his vineyard.

I imagine that everyone here has – at some time in our life – worked for a set amount per hour. If it was \$5 per hour, and we worked for eight hours, we earned \$40 total. And if we had only worked for two hours, we would have earned a total of \$10. . . . I also think that most everyone here has – at some time in our life – worked “per piece.” Maybe we earned 25 cents for picking a flat of strawberries, or a bushel of apples. Or perhaps we did laundry for a set amount per load; or charged so much per shirt for ironing. . . . All told, our various work experiences lead us to believe that it is only right to pay people for the work they've done. We might also believe that every worker should be treated fairly, and that every person should have an equal shot at any job opening. . . . With that in mind, I'd say there were parts of Jesus' parable that most of us agreed with because of how the workers were treated. And maybe there were other parts that we did not agree with because of how the workers were treated. For example, if we've had the experience of not being able to find work when we were really hard-pressed and needed money – we probably thought the estate manager was a real prince of a guy for continuing to hire people throughout the day. My gosh, the man went out of his way from dawn to dusk to give all these different people an opportunity to work! How great was that?! And at the end of the day he paid everybody cash, right then and there – so no one had to wait another two weeks for their pay check to be “processed” by payroll.

But did we think it was “fair” that every one of the workers received the same amount for their work, no matter how many hours they had worked that day? Was that a “yes” and “no” for you? I mean “yes” the people hired first thing in the morning agreed to work for a dollar a day. They made that decision up front. They knew what they would be paid BEFORE they started working. But did *they* think it was fair that people who worked three hours less, or six hours less, or nine hours less, or even eleven hours less, should also be paid a dollar for their work? “No.” Would you have been happy if you worked twelve hours and were paid the same amount as someone who only worked one, or three, or six, or nine hours? Probably not.

But if you were flat broke and someone chose to hire you to work towards the end of the day and paid you a full day's wages – wouldn't you have been ecstatic? What a windfall to go from having nothing to eat, and no way to earn anything all day, to suddenly having some work and the ability to buy food at the end of the day! Wow! That's a rare and glorious thing to have happen! We'd be grateful if that happened to us, wouldn't we? But would we still be so grateful if it happened to somebody else? Or would we instead say, “That's not fair!” It comes back to our individual point of view. And the “I” view tends to be rather self-centered: if something is good for us – yeah! But if something is *better* for somebody else, than it is for us – we're more “nay” than “yeah” about it.

When God chooses to offer eternal life to us, and is willing to forgive our sins – of course we think that’s great! But when we learn that God also offers eternal life to *everyone*, and is willing to forgive *anyone* of their sins – at *any* time . . . we think, hey! That doesn’t seem quite right. There are some people who have done incredibly awful things, why should God forgive them? Why would God forgive them? . . . But my friends, as soon as we start thinking that way – we should stop. Because who are we that God should forgive us? Or that we should have eternal life? If we were going to line people up in the order of how deserving they are of receiving these gifts from God – do we think that we would be at the head of the line? I mean honestly, don’t we think that at least the first disciples, or the martyrs, or Mother Teresa, or Jesus’ mother Mary should be ahead of us in line? Shouldn’t they get something *more* than what we receive from God? . . . And yet God chooses to be just as generous to them, as God is to us, and as God is to anybody else. God is as generous to the last as to the first. God is generous to all. That’s the amazing good news of God’s love and grace – it is available to all. Freely given to anyone. It is the same love and grace that the Israelites witnessed in the wilderness in the Glory of God, the arrival of quail, and the gift of manna that was enough for their daily bread. It is always the same. It is always enough.

May God be patient with us as we continue to learn that the generous over-abundance of God’s love and grace is enough for each of us every day. Amen.