



## CONCORD SUNDAY SCHOOL

### LESSON 38

SUNDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 20,  
2020

#### **Matthew 20:1-16 NRSV**

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4 and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5 When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6 And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ 7 They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ 9 When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13 But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

## **Background**

This passage takes up a considerable portion of the chapter. In this same chapter, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection. And later, a mother asks Jesus if her children will have access to the Kingdom. This chapter is full of Jesus redirecting people to understand what heaven means...and doesn't mean. When you read this chapter on your own, consider what Heaven looks like for you, what Jesus is talking about, and what you've been taught about Heaven. Are there overlaps or differences?

**Today's lesson will focus on the equity of Christ's Kingdom.**

**Read the scripture out loud together.**

**Discuss with someone in your home. Why is money so often the root of arguments between friends, lovers, family members? Why do you think money gets so many politicians in trouble?**

### **What's happening during this passage?**

Jesus is offering a parable about laborers who come to work in the vineyard. This is a story meant to be about the kingdom of heaven. The owner goes out to hire laborers and agrees with them all for a "daily wage." He does this at 9, noon, 3, and right before quitting time at 5. With each group he says, "I will pay you whatever is right." At the 5 o'clock group, he meets people who have been "standing idle all day" because "no one has hired" them. And so, this group is included too.

When it comes time to give out checks, those hired last received the *full* day's wage. Each group received their pay as it was distributed in order of most-recent to longest-working. They all received the same wage for the day's work. Eventually the people who worked the land longest felt disrespected.

*"These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."*

But Jesus, in the voice of the landowner says, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

## **Why is it significant that this is a parable?**

A parable is a glimpse into Christ's imagination. Parables are hard to decipher because they can be taken literally or not. There are often elements in the story that don't seem to make sense. There are also elements that feel familiar. Jesus is speaking in code, using a heavenly folk-tale. The beauty of parables is that they are, in fact, made-up stories. They're teaching tools that are meant to help people understand a more complex idea.

It is important to remember that there is no real landowner described here, there is no real field. Except, of course, there is. This is Jesus imagining a scenario that is intentionally designed. We don't know where this story came from. Was it an old fable that he heard at the kitchen table? Was it a story his father or mother used to tell at bedtime? Did he make it up himself?

In Christ's imagination, everyone gets the same wage. It feels like something out of a fairy tale, because we know that this is not how things often work in real life.

## **Is this even fair?**

This wasn't fair in the eyes of the people who worked the longest. But for the people who just got to the field, they may have felt like they could finally breathe. We don't know why the latecomers are late. Maybe the latecomers were watching children and waiting on another parent to get home from work. Maybe the latecomers had a car that broke down for the third time this month. Maybe the latecomers couldn't read the information for employment because they didn't speak the language. We don't know what obstacles the latecomers had to overcome.

If you are one of the longest-working laborers, this feels unfair. But if you came late, you might feel like the landowner was gracious. Perspective matters.

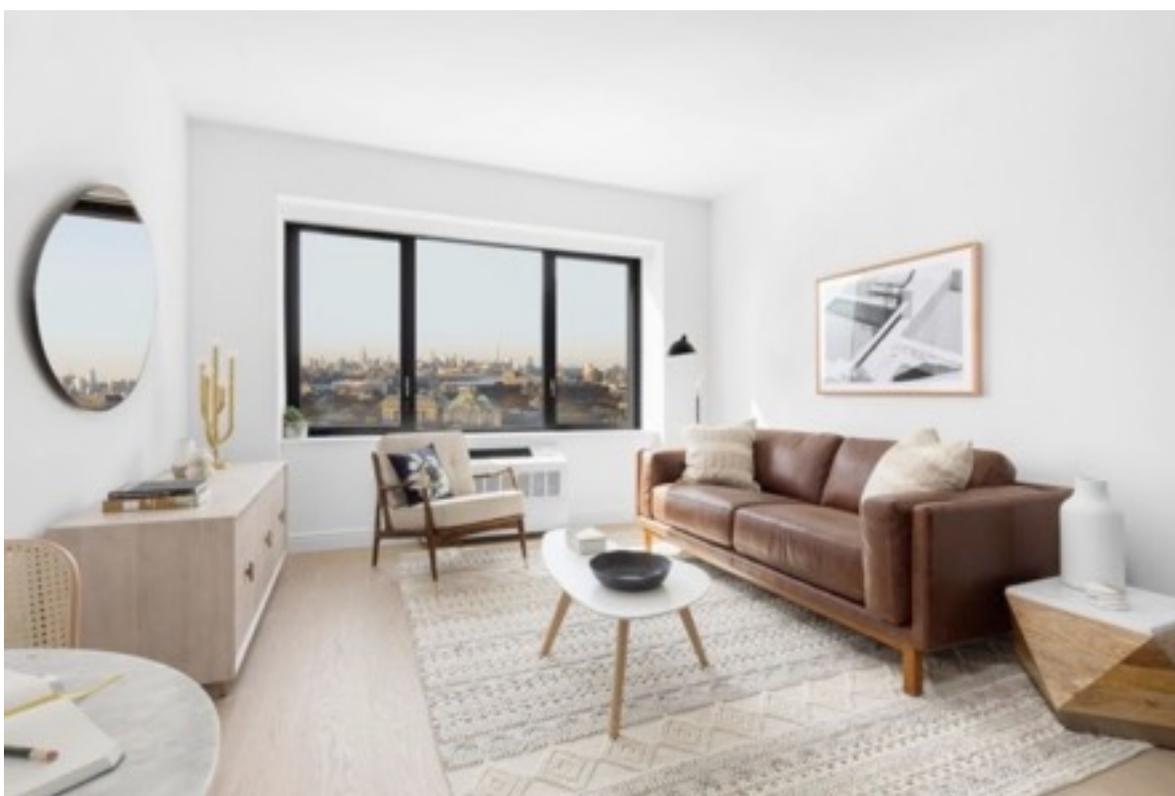
Jesus, in the voice of the landowner, had already agreed with everyone for the daily wage because everyone had daily needs to be met. Rent, food, medicine, clothes, water. No one had an issue until they saw what other people were being paid.

## **Why does Jesus offer the same wage to everyone?**

As Christians, we use this scripture often to speak about Heaven. When we talk about Grace and Mercy, we say, "it doesn't matter when you accept Christ in your heart, if you believe, he will take you in." And this is true! You do not need to have a long churchgoing resume to be loved by Christ.

And, Jesus is making a statement about the things we deserve today. We deserve a daily wage, one that can sustain our living. No matter what kind of job you have. Whether you're retired or a student, a sanitation worker or a bus driver, a teacher or a stay at home parent, you deserve to have your needs met. Everyone has to eat. Wouldn't it be nice to have a taste of heaven before you get there?

**What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?**



### **Connection to Today's World**

The housing lottery is now active for 810 Fulton Street. It has been billed as an “affordable housing development.” Only, the recommended incomes are between 81,000 and 160,000 U.S. dollars. It is located on the border of Clinton Hill and Fort Greene, and has 363 rental units available. It is intentionally marketed as “15 minutes away from the LIRR” at Atlantic Avenue-Barclay Center.

At the same time, there are thousands of empty apartments across the city. Tenant organizers and housing advocates have named this phenomenon the “sixth borough.” Consider all the empty spaces available that are just too expensive for the daily wage. What is the solution to this issue, in your opinion? Should the prices of these rentals come down? Should the government issue subsidies to support people living here if they don't make the recommended rate? What other options are there to fix this?

**Journal: What would you do if you did not have to work for money?  
How would you spend your days if you knew you'd always have a safe  
place to live, a full fridge, and healthcare?**

---

---

---

**Closing:** Sing/watch "I Got a Home," Fisk Jubilee Singers

For a video, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vL71u5Xuk4>

I've got a home in that rock, don't you see?  
I've got a home in that rock, don't you see?  
Between the earth and sky I thought I heard my Savior cry  
You better get home in that rock, don't you see?

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

You have promised us daily bread, and your Son has promised a daily wage. You see our hungry bellies and longing hearts. You know how to feed our hearts and bodies.

Bread of heaven, feed us 'til we want no more.

Show us how to be grateful for the resources we do have. Help us to be good stewards of whatever we do have.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

Works Cited:

<https://newyorkyimby.com/2020/09/housing-lottery-opens-for-810-fulton-avenue-in-clinton-hill-brooklyn.html?fbclid=IwAR1Lp1mQm-yK7bVk5fcbMGVPA10GWMxgPvrYoFvFqXPSSSz7ck-TivQu-5E>