

**Psalm 105:37-45**

*Then God brought Israel out, filled with silver and gold;  
not one of its tribes stumbled.  
Egypt celebrated when they left,  
because the dread of Israel had come upon them.*

*God spread out clouds as a covering;  
gave lightning to provide light at night.  
The people asked, and God brought quail;  
God filled them full with food from heaven.  
God opened the rock and out gushed water—  
flowing like a river through the desert!  
Because God remembered his holy promise  
to Abraham his servant,  
God brought his people out with rejoicing,  
his chosen ones with songs of joy.  
God gave them the lands of other nations;  
they inherited the wealth of many peoples—  
all so that they would keep his laws  
and observe his instructions.*

*Praise the Lord!*

**Matthew 20:1-16**

*'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. 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?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." 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." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 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." 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? 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.'*

**This is the Word of the Lord...**

It is what it is.

God gives the same amount of grace and love no matter what time we show up to work in the vineyard.

However, since we're here at church on a gorgeous early fall Sunday morning, we might assume that we are the early risers in the story, the ones promised a day's wage, the ones who toil in the sun. We are in the vineyard first. Our privilege of being assured of where we stand with God means we have time and the arrogance to look at the others filing in behind – and question how God rewards them.

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

*But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual day wage?"*

**When you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.**

An elementary school starts handing out cookies to all of the students at the end of the school day on Fridays. After just a couple of weeks of this, by the end of Friday, the school is buzzing with excitement and as the students are released from their homerooms to line up at the doors there is a palpable excitement, and pushing and shoving ensues at the front of the line.

At the back of the line are the students who needed extra help in the classroom and so they stayed longer, some just couldn't get to the line any faster, and some hadn't heard that this cookie thing was every week.

The eighth week, as the students who were closer to the doors looked outside expectantly waiting for the teachers to show up with the cookies, they hear a commotion behind them and slowly they begin to turn around and realize that the teachers are handing out the cookies starting at the back of the line. Now last, were first; and the first up by the doors, would be last.

Is that fair... or unfair?

The people at the front of the line had worked hard to get there – they paid attention, they used their physical skills and smarts to get to the front of the line. It wasn't their fault the ones at the back of the line were slower or weren't paying attention.

On the other hand... it was only because of the generosity of the teachers that anyone got cookies at all. No one fully deserved the cookies. Shouldn't they just be thankful that they received cookies?

Everyone ultimately received the same amount of cookies. But still it felt unfair to those in the front that those in the back received the cookies first. If there wasn't a problem with how the cookies were being handed out, why change it?

**Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because it's not a problem to you personally.**

On Friday night I came to church to hear from an incredibly courageous and informative panel about the challenges of addiction. I am so thankful for the people on the panel and the Peacemaking & Justice Committee for putting together the event. The Panel was followed by the documentary: *The Anonymous People*<sup>i</sup> - a feature film about the over 23 million Americans living in long term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

The website with more information about this film and movement can be found at: [manyfaces1voice.org](http://manyfaces1voice.org). Their own description is: "We are moms and dads, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters – all bringing the power and proof of recovery to our communities. Together we will change public perception, and ultimately the public response to the addiction crisis... FOREVER."

The movie named how the social stigma of addiction and the judgment of those who are and have struggled with addiction as having a moral failing, rather than a disease, has kept a large percentage of our population from getting the help they need. Here was one of the examples they used that particularly struck me:

If someone is diabetic, and they stop taking their insulin and have an emergency - how are they treated? They're taken to the emergency room, they're admitted to the hospital, they're kept there until their blood sugars and other vitals are regulated, and then there is follow-up with doctors and other professionals to make sure they are provided with the knowledge and care that they need to live their lives with the disease.

If someone is an addict, and they have an emergency – how are they treated? Maybe they're taken to the emergency room, maybe even they're admitted – but eventually they get kicked out into rehab, if they're lucky – but the resources for that are few and the stays are often not sufficient enough – more likely they're put back out into the streets or even in jail with no resources and no support to help them live their lives with the disease.

I have the privilege of not having a predisposition to addiction. Does that mean that addiction isn't a problem?

22 million Americans currently suffer from addiction, and only 1 in 10 receive treatment. Untreated addiction costs America over \$350 billion annually. And those two statistics are from 2012.

It's a problem.

I know privilege has become one of those loaded words in the politics of today. According to Merriam Webster, the definition of privilege is: *a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage or favor*<sup>ii</sup>. I never considered myself privileged growing up. That was the word for the kids that went to the private school, and the private country club, and the private beach club... well, we did do that for a few years.

Most of us probably don't see ourselves as particularly privileged. But I also think if we're honest, most of us would agree that compared to the rest of the world, and maybe even our surrounding community, we are the 'haves' not the 'have nots'.

Rarely – if ever – are we truly the have nots, and so the question for us becomes... why aren't we more generous with what we have?

Because of the generosity of God's love and abundance of God's grace we not only receive eternal life, but have the privilege – yes, *the right granted as beloved children of God* – to work in the vineyard in the first place.

How do we respond to this abundant grace?

I think of the men who started and continue to run Lend-a-Hand, the mission arm of the Presbytery of Carlisle that began as a response to Hurricane Hugo, and along with local efforts also organized trips to Mississippi to support victims of Hurricane Katrina, and New Jersey to provide assistance after Superstorm Sandy. They are already laying the groundwork with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance in Florida.

In New Jersey I was working on site with one of the guys that goes on the trips just about every month and he said it was an absolute honor to do what he does. When he retired from teaching he wasn't sure what was next, and now he is grateful that he has the time and the resources to give back to God through Lend-a-Hand.

For him, it's an honor to work in the vineyard.

Do we hide and keep what's ours to ourselves, worried that God's grace and abundance will only go so far? Or do we live freely, trusting the one who asked us to labor in the vineyard, knowing that there is plenty of God's grace and love to go around.

Everyone – all of us – in this Sanctuary and outside of it are equally deserving and undeserving to work in the vineyard. We are called to respond to God's grace for us with gratitude and generosity.

Our future in Christ Jesus is assured... let us respond to this Good News with gratitude and generosity, so that whether we arrive at 9 or at noon or at 3 or at five... our days in the vineyard, are the best day.

In the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://manyfaces1voice.org/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/privilege>