

DAILY BREAD

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

September 20, 2026

Pentecost 17

Exodus 16:11-15

Then [Adonai] spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the complaining of the people of Israel. Say this to them: “In the evening you will eat meat, and in the morning, you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I, [Adonai], am your God.”” So it came about that in the evening quail flew in and all around the camp. And in the morning, there was a layer of dew all around the camp; when the layer of dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were flakes of something: delicate, powdery, fine as frost. When they saw this, the people of Israel said to each other, “What is this?”—not knowing what it was. But Moses told them, “This is the bread [Adonai] has given you to eat.

Matthew 20:1-16

The kingdom of heaven is like the owner of an estate who went out at dawn to hire workers for his vineyard. After reaching an agreement with them for the usual daily wage, the owner sent them out to the vineyard. About mid morning, the owner came out and saw others standing around the market without work, and said to them, “You go along to my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is fair.” At that they left. Around noon and again in the mid afternoon, the owner came out and did the same. Finally, going out late in the afternoon, the owner found still others standing around and said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day?” “No one has hired us,” they replied. The owner said, “You go to my vineyard, too.” When evening came, the owner said to the overseer, “Call the workers and give them their pay, but begin with the last group and end with the first.” When those hired late in the afternoon came up, they received a full day's pay, and when the first group appeared they assumed they would get more. Yet they all received the same daily wage. Thereupon they complained to the owner, “This last group did only an hour's work, but you've put them on the same basis as those who worked a full day in the scorching heat.” “My friends,” said the owner to those who voiced this complaint, “I do you no injustice. You agreed on the usual wage, didn't you? Take your pay and go home. I intend to give this worker who was hired last the same pay as you. I'm free to do as I please with my money, aren't I? Are you envious because I am generous?” Thus the last will be first and the first will be last.



The people complained to Moses. They complained to Aaron in the wilderness. *If only we had lived out our lives in the land of Egypt where we sat by the pots of meat and had our fill of bread. But you have brought us out here to kill us all with hunger.*

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Now, at some places along the way, the people and Moses and Aaron likely found marketplaces where they could trade or purchase supplies. They would have harvested wild grains and fruits. They would have hunted local game. But there were places deeper in the wilderness. As the supplies ran dangerously low tummies began to ache. People became tired. They went days without food or water. And they were desperate. Moses and Aaron knew that themselves, even before they heard about it from the people. It was the perfect circumstances to second guess the whole plan. *Maybe forced indentured servitude wasn't so bad.* At least you had some food regularly. But even that complaint (wouldn't it have been better to go back to Egypt) probably was not realistic. Would they survive the trip back without supplies? And how would they be received when they got back?

The people were willing to work for their food along the way. They would trade. They would forage. They would hunt. But the circumstances were that those choices were no longer available to them at the time of this story. And so they rightfully complained. What emerges in light of that context is the providence of God in the form of unexpected quails, mysterious morning bread.

The other reading we heard from Matthew also contains a measure of complaining, although it's quite different from the complaining of the people in the Exodus. In the Exodus, the complaint was, "We are going to starve without something to eat." The complaint in Matthew was, "Hey, how come those people aren't starving?" The common theme, though, is that people's expectations aren't being met, so they complain.

The parable of those vineyard workers is one of those stories where Jesus' intent was most obviously to have the listeners imagine themselves as characters in the story. *If it was me in that story, I'd be thinking this way...* That's what Jesus wants.

And you heard the story. people. All of them agreed to work in the vineyard for the standard daily wage, a denarius, which is a Roman silver coin that was typically given to soldiers as their per diem. It was also the wage for a common laborer in much of the empire, which would allow the worker to feed themselves and their family for a day. It was not a way that you could accumulate wealth. You weren't going to get rich working for a denarius a day. It was enough only to eat that day and then you would need to find work for the next day and the next day and so on and so on. The basic premise of Jesus' story today is that this was normal. You get hired for the day, you'd get paid at Demarius, and you'd be able to subsist for another day. As we heard, the story gets a little more interesting and complex when we learn that the vineyard owner had to keep hiring new workers throughout the day. In fact, right up until the last hour. Now, the story doesn't tell us why more workers were hired throughout the day. Maybe there weren't enough workers available at the start of the day. Maybe the vineyard owner thought, "Well, if I really push, we could get the harvest done today." And Jesus doesn't tell us why there were still unhired workers in the square throughout the day. There's one bit where Jesus says that some of them were overlooked by employers. *Why are you still here and not working? No one has hired us.* There's something about these workers that's undesirable to employers. But also maybe people weren't getting hired earlier because they weren't there earlier. Maybe they had further to travel to get to the market square. Maybe they had duties at home that they had to tend to first. Maybe there was an ailing relative who had to be tended to. Maybe they were there earlier, got a job and lost it.

Because the latest hire-es were paid first, the full day workers watched the overseer hand out the coins. And they got excited when they saw denarius being handed out to those first workers because they assumed (like many modern listeners to this parable) that the fairest way to deal with workers who work part-time is to pay them by the hour. That way everybody gets the same per hour. If a denarius was the pay for one hour, then if we worked the full day, 12 hours, we might get as much as 12 denarii for the sunrise to sunset day. And that's a

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very real and a very reasonable thing to believe and to complain about when it doesn't come about because we think it's very fair that you should make what you earn.

You heard the twist. Those 12-hour workers earned the wage that they had agreed to receive when they first started working at the start of the day. They were not underpaid according to the norms of the regular day labor worker wages at the time. They were only underpaid by the logic of an hourly wage, not a daily wage. And they heap judgment on the situation. *Did they earn their denarius as much as I did?* In a modern workplace, this kind of pay discrepancy would most certainly be a topic for a formal grievance. Call your union rep. And it would probably be the impetus for a desire to renegotiate one's contract. Certainly pro athletes only seem to be happy with their contracts until some different players on another team signs for more. And then all of a sudden, it's like, *oh, the injustice of it all. How shall I subsist to my 14 million a year?*

In telling this story, Jesus wants the audience to quite legitimately feel that the pay situation was not fair, that the 1-hour workers got too much. And so, there's two possible solutions if you think that that's the problem. You give the full day workers more or you take money back from the part-day workers. That would be fair based on the logic of an hourly wage.

Of course, as is the case with most of Jesus' stories, Jesus' parables, this was not really about the literal details of the story. We should know by just the first six verses of our Matthew reading today that this is not about workers in a vineyard. Jesus begins the story by saying *the realm of God is like...* and then goes into the story. This is not a story about workers in a vineyard. Jesus is describing part of the very nature of God and God's relationship to humanity.

What God offers is not changed by what we've earned or even what we deserve. The workers' parable is not about wages. It's not about the value of work. It's a story about grace.

And when we realize that it's a story about grace and not about wages, we all of a sudden switch our focus in the parable. We're no longer those full day workers. We are the last workers to be hired who still have families to feed. We are the recipients of grace whether it was earned or not.

Give us this day our daily bread. Or as we're going to pray it in a paraphrase a little later in the service, *with the bread we need for today, feed us.*

As followers of Jesus, as emissaries for our God in this world, we should be strong advocates and providers (as we are able) of daily bread. Spirit of Hope United Church supports and enables the good work of the Garneau Strathcona Food Security Program that graciously gives out food hampers every Saturday morning.

Is God the only one capable of offering grace? Is God the only one capable of offering generosity beyond earning?

Love God with your whole heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Those were the most important commandments in Jesus' mind. Seeing the Exodus experience, seeing the vineyard parable in that context of loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbors of ourselves, at a bare minimum, God desires that people's daily sustenance is taken care of.

The United Church of Canada through its congregations and communities of faith, through the work of regional and national staff, raise loud voices of social conscience that expect governments and those in power and

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those with the ability to enact laws and to provide programs to ensure that all receive their daily bread.

It's not a very high bar. Just don't let anyone go hungry today. As far as social responsibilities go, it's pretty minimal. Don't let anyone go hungry today. And yet, it happens all the time.

Not on my watch, says [adonai] in the wilderness.

Not on my watch, says the vineyard owner.

The promise that's explicit in Exodus and implied in Matthew was that this pattern would need to repeat day after day because the need repeats and so the activity repeats every day. In fact, in the Exodus story, if we've read on, we'd realize that people, if they didn't trust that promise and they tried to collect more than they needed for that day, the manna-bread just didn't have the shelf life to last through the second day.

And so the work of being agents, being vessels of God's grace, cannot be a one-and-done activity because the cycle starts over with each new day. Grace needs to be a renewable commodity. Fairness and generosity are to be daily goals, a daily mission.

Each new sunrise, there will be people in the marketplace. Each new sunset, there will be families needing to share their meal for the day. All should be able to get an affirming answer to a very basic prayer. Give us this day our daily bread. Amen.

#23TLUS For Everyone Born

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