

'Whiners and Winers'
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September 24, 2017

based on Exodus 16:2-15 and Matthew 20:1-16

Today's sermon is entitled: Whiners and Winers.

Whiners complain or protest in a childish or annoying fashion.

Winers are ones who whine *and* dine.

Whiners and Winers are foundationally: complainers. They grumble and criticize.

Today we look at Whiners and Winers from Exodus and Matthew, and we'll talk about how Jesus reveals an important aspect of God in these stories.

The story of the Whiners is about the Israelites wandering around the desert on their 40 year journey to the Promised Land. This journey began after escaping oppression in Egypt at the hands of the Pharaoh. The Israelites were persecuted and made to labor *long* hours making bricks for Pharaoh's kingdom ... for little or no pay.

Day after day the people labored long and hard and were persecuted and mistreated by their overseers. They cried out to God to save them from the torment.

... and ultimately, as the story goes, God hears their cries and brings them out of the land of Egypt and promises them a land of milk and honey.

The entire Exodus storyline is foundationally an epic tale about learning to trust God ... but not without whining, and grumbling, and complaining.

Throughout the long arduous journey, and a series of lessons and laws, the Israelites learn: God provides. God saves. God rules justly.

In our reading today the Whiners haven't yet figured out how to trust God.

Admittedly that's hard when your stomachs are empty. They complain to Moses and Aaron of their hunger ... and God hears their complaining and responds with a deliverance of bread (or manna) in the morning and meat in the evening.

God provides. God saves. God rules justly.

In order to test the Whiners, God gives very specific instructions how the Israelite wanderers are to collect the flakes of manna left from the morning dew. They are only to collect enough for the day's need. They were not to store up manna, but gather only enough for their daily needs.

By following God's direction, the Israelites learn to trust God for their daily bread.

In this story God provides the daily bread; God saves the people from starvation; and God's justice surprises them with manna from heaven freeing them from hunger and fear.

Then we have the Winers from Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus begins his parable saying: "the kingdom of heaven is like" ... then goes on to describe this befuddling situation between a landowner and some laborers.

A landowner hires workers early one morning to work in his vineyard. The grapes are ready for harvest and workers are few.

Later in the morning he notices more workers who want to work and hires them to pick the grapes.

Again, and again the landowner hires more laborers, until finally with only one hour to spare there are still workers who desire to labor in the landowners vineyard...and they too are offered a wage for "whatever is right."

When it comes time to pay all the laborers, the landowner begins with those hired last and ends with the first hired ... paying them ALL the same wage!

Wait! What? Laborers who worked 10 hours get paid the same as someone who only worked one hour? How is that "fair?"

Maybe calling the hard working laborers 'winers' isn't fair. Here they were, hired to harvest the grapes in the vineyard and work hard in the hot sun ... and they end up getting paid the same as someone who only worked one hour.

They were grumbling and complaining because everyone knows ... the more you worked, the more you should be paid.

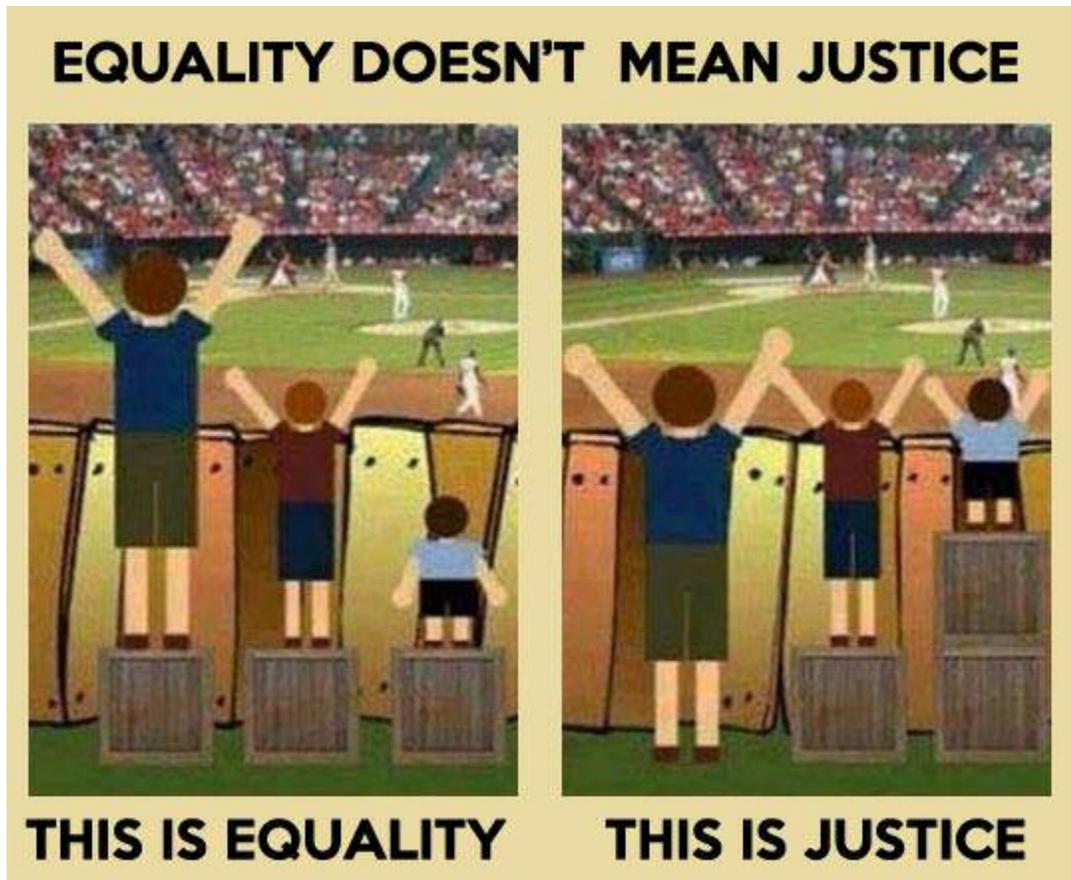
Do the 'Winers' have a point? Is it fair to pay someone an equal wage whether one worked 10 hours or 1 hour?

As a former hourly worker who labored long hours in a Mexican restaurant to pay my way through college ... No! It is not fair.

But is it just?

There is a big difference between equality and justice. Theologians debate this all the time. God's economy of grace is based on a different currency that believes it is far more cost effective when an economy of grace focuses on justice instead of equality.

You have an insert in today's bulletin. On one side are the stories of the Whiners and the Winers ... and on the other is a cartoon depiction of the difference between equality and justice.



The laborers hired first are the able-bodied child who has no problem looking over the fence whether standing on a box or not. The laborers hired in the middle of the day need a bit of a boost to see over the fence ... but it is those who, for whatever reason, were not able-bodied from the beginning, who need the extra boost.

That is an image of God's economy: where those who are not able-bodied receive the same gift of grace with equity.

God's economy makes no sense to Winers or Whiners. Yet it is God's economy of grace that best reflects what Jesus teaches us about the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is no Whiners or Winers in the Kingdom of Heaven.

What we do receive in the Kingdom of Light and Love is the ability to see justice as more loving than equality. The Kingdom of Heaven is where Whiners and Winers are replaced with people who sing joyful praise and exhibit patient love; who offer genuine gratitude ... and the songs we sing rise from loving hearts.

That is the Kingdom of Heaven. Where the littlest and the last are given the biggest boost.

Is this still a hard concept to grasp? Yes; I'm sure all of us can think of situations where this kind of economy could be abused. But that's not the point here.

The complainers on their long arduous journey through the desert on their way to the

Promised Lane had a right to voice their displeasure at going hungry.

The complainers who worked long hours in the vineyard only to receive the same pay as someone who worked less ... also have a point.

But God's mercy works more like manna from heaven – where a sudden happening brings good fortune.

I guess you could say those laborers who waited all day to be hired experienced that same sudden happening that brought them good fortune.

We are left today confounded by the truth of God's grace:

- God's grace provides.
- God's grace saves.
- and God's grace seeks justice for the little ones ... the least and the last.

Our idea of the Kingdom of Heaven has been greatly challenged.

What is good for us to remember in the Eucharistic symbolism in these two stories of Whiners and Winers is ultimately stories of salvation.

The stories of bread, or manna from heaven, and grapes (harvested from the vineyard ripe with fruit) ... is our connection to God through Jesus.

Every time we share in the Lord's Supper we too receive the surprising gift of manna from heaven and drink from the fruit of the vine.

In that symbolic sharing of Holy Communion we experience the justice loving God that forgives our sins ... no matter if our sins are big or small ... no matter if we labor long and hard or are new believers ... we are all offered grace because God's grace is just.

There are some days ... that is mighty good news!

Thanks be to God! Amen.