

The average pay for a teacher in New York is \$86,000 a year. The average salary for a teacher in West Virginia is \$45,000 a year.

What constitutes fair and unfair when it comes to setting a salary? Pay discrepancy is a hot topic in many corners. Does a teacher in West Virginia work any less, prepare any less, face fewer challenges than a teacher in New York? I know we have to allow for cost of living, but, seriously, is it fair?

What constitutes fair and unfair in our text today?

Anyone who has worked an hourly wage at some time in their life can appreciate the inequity in this story. Should someone who has only worked one hour receive the same compensation as the one who has put in a full day's work? I don't even have to think about this. The answer is no. It's just not right.

Rev. Dr. Greg De Loach says that just a block away from where he once served as pastor, was a meeting place for day laborers to gather. Mostly men, young and old, who would do nearly any kind of work- yard work, painting, carpentry, hauling away trash-in order to earn enough to put food on their table that day.

They were not lazy or loitering, they were willing to stand in a place of humility, and present themselves for work. They only wanted what all of us want- a way to provide for themselves and their loved ones. The circumstances we can debate, but the need and the desire are universal.

Remember last week when I talked a bit about "Jesus math"? Well, here's another example of it. Jesus math and our math are calculated differently.

Many biblical scholars believe this parable describes justice in God's economy. What was the concern? There was considerable controversy between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Jewish Christians, like Saul, who became Paul at his conversion, wrote about this in his letters to the early churches. He tried to settle the debate when he said "there is no longer Jew or Gentile," and so forth. Gentile Christians were often considered "Johnny-come-lately" believers. They were considered "lesser thans," with little agency in the emerging church. Paul believed this was wrong-headed.

In the parable, when the workers begin to grumble, the owner asks, "Are you envious because I'm generous?" In Greek, this is translated as "Is your eye evil because I am good?"

Many of us have an eye for evil. That is, we see evil where God sees good. Jesus said so. But, in our defense, is it evil to believe that someone working one hour should be paid less than one who worked all day long?

Jesus calls us out on this. The landowner in the story says, “Oh, but it’s my vineyard, my money. We agreed to a wage and I’m not paying you one cent less. I keep my word. Your beef is that I see a way to do good here. I am seeing good.”

How can we see good when there is so much evil in the world? You name it: there are so many cruel injustices in life: racism and sexism, crime, religious persecution, ethnic cleansing. There are disasters that bring destruction and death. We are reminded of evil 24 hours a day.

And we care deeply about overcoming injustice. The General Assembly has designated today Christian and Society Sunday. We are called on to take our citizenship seriously. The Church calls on all people of faith to work toward a world of peace and equality. We lost a champion in that mission with the death of Ruth Bader Ginsberg Friday night. She understood fully the obstacles of injustice: she was a woman, a Jew, and a working mother. And my heroine.

When we say God is good, we have to be willing to admit that God’s goodness, God’s presence and power, is always held in tension with the cold hard facts: evil exists.

But, let’s return to an application of Jesus math. What good is God pointing us toward in this story?

The faithful, hard-working laborers believe they are more valuable than the late-coming workers. They deserve a larger expression of the landowner’s favor. In spiritual terms, Jesus says: the newest convert has as much voice as the one who has been in the church since they were on the Cradle Roll. The newest members have agency same as the old-timers.

One of the things I’ve learned and love about Kuhn is that several people came to Kuhn when St. Andrews closed. And, you have embraced one another, included one another, value one another. Your faith and lives are richer because of your relationships. I might even go so far as to say that what was a traumatic event turned out to be a blessing. God used it for good.

Rev. Suzanne Guthrie offers these remarks related to this passage:

A man named Peter died and his wife asked Suzanne to officiate his funeral service. The only problem was that Peter had no use for religion. He was vocal and profane about his lack of need for God or any of God’s associates.

Well, Peter became very sick. He was a drug addict, skilled at manipulation, mad at the world, and terminally ill with AIDS.

But, Suzanne says, Peter got to see heaven. One day, the space above the television, beyond the wall and the ceiling, opened into a billowing heaven. He saw dead relatives. He saw angels. Peter described in detail to his family what he was seeing. In the next death crisis, Peter allowed the priest he'd previously thrown out of his room, to hear his confession. And Peter died in peace, having seen heaven in the eleventh hour.

Some of us, who have worked in the vineyard of God all our lives, have never seen heaven. Not once. Mother Teresa is remembered as saying she never had a personal theophany-a vision-of God. But, what wonders God did through her. Others have seen God through her ministry.

Who did God love more? Mother Teresa of Calcutta, or Peter, the addict?

God loved them both more than we can even imagine. Because in Jesus math, you just can't put a price on grace.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

***Affirmation of Faith** (from A Brief Statement of Faith)

**We trust in God,
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community,
but we rebel against God, we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.**

**Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.**

Charge and Blessing

Go out into the world in peace. Have courage! Hold fast to what is good. Return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the suffering. Honor all people. Love and serve the Lord your God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Announcements

It has been the tradition of the Barboursville community to come together annually for a Service of Thanksgiving. In observation of health and safety guidelines, the Barboursville area ministers will offer a virtual Thanksgiving service this year. Details will follow.

The Greater Barboursville Community Outreach dinners have been suspended due to the pandemic. Food insecurity is still a problem in our area. You are encouraged to support charitable organizations that focus on feeding the hungry among us.

Christ the King Lutheran Church and Pea Ridge United Methodist Church will host a pet blessing, in observance of St. Francis Day, on Sunday, October 4 at 4PM at the pavilion behind CTK. You are invited to bring your pets and join in this special occasion. Please remember to wear a mask.

Leading worship today: Mr. Mark Baker, Music; Rev. Cinda Harkless, Pastor