

Text: Philippians 1; Matthew 20

Title: The privilege of simplicity and the survival of the weakest.

Rev. Sharon Smith

“Katherine stepped forward – trembling before the [Bishop’s] barked commands – her hands tight around the crucifix that the abbess had given her. This was the moment, the moment she had both dreaded and welcomed. From this moment there was no more return that there was return from the grave...”

“Fear shook Katherine’s body as she realized the import of this time. No more walks in the garden with [her friends], no more possibility of marriage and children, no more [watching annual mystery plays with her brother]... once she entered that anchor hold, she could go nowhere else, for any reason. Ever.”

“Is it your vocation to spend your life here in prayer?”

“That day Katherine was dead and buried. And Julian... Julian of Norwich lived on”.

Excerpts from Julian’s Cell by Ralph Milton

Today we hear her words. Today we stand asking for a seed of her courage to make hard choices for the sake of the world.

On Wednesday, a group gathers on Zoom at 10am to practice contemplation.
This week we sat with Julian in her cell.

We were moved by the fragility of all life;
we were in despair at the state of the Earth...

of humanities’ actions in disrupting ecological balance, and

We felt invited to sit with the question – what does it mean to choose to live simply?

A question that is born out of privilege...

for most people that is not even an option – they simply focus on survival.

What does it mean to choose to live simply?

Our texts today take us to another cell... not one of choice but because of Roman punishment. Paul... in prison or in house arrest with a capital charge – either in Caesarea or Ephesus, it’s the early 60’s AD.

And just like it is now...

- Being in jail was a source of great shame,
- But somehow, because of his understanding of the life and death of Jesus and the risen Christ, Paul reverses the typical understanding of what would bring shame and what would bring honor.

And Jesus parable does the same. It presents for us a **great reversal**.

Equality or equity?

It has been called - The Parable of the Affirmative Action Employer.

Especially when read from the perspective of those in our world with the greatest need.

And to get us there, into that mindset, out of our privilege for just a minute...

I highly recommend an article by Hispanic Biblical scholar: Pablo A. Jiménez called:

The Laborers of the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16): A Hispanic Homiletical Reading

This article helps us to read this passage through a different lens – from the perspective of the...

- "desempleados," the unemployed Latinos who stand at intersections of busy streets, waiting for somebody to pass by and offer them twenty dollars in exchange for doing house or yard chores.
- from the perspective of the "niñeras" and the "sirvientas," Latinas who provide child care and housekeeping for the affluent.
- from the perspective of the "braceros," the migrant agricultural workers who travel from state to state or province to province, picking crops.
- from the perspective of the "costureras," Latinas who work all day sewing, sometimes at home and sometimes in a factory.
- from the perspective of the "obreros," the workers who provide cheap labor in construction and custodial jobs.

It takes its angle from Latinos and Latinas who work today not knowing if they will have a paycheck tomorrow.

And from this perspective Hispanic theology, approaches the gospels:

- as a liberating story,
- an affirmation of the full humanity of the "excluded."
- the proclamation of the God of life who hears the cry of the poor, the marginalized, and those who are rejected because of their gender or their racial-ethnic background.

From this perspective, no longer do we read the parable as being unfair, if we consider the following...

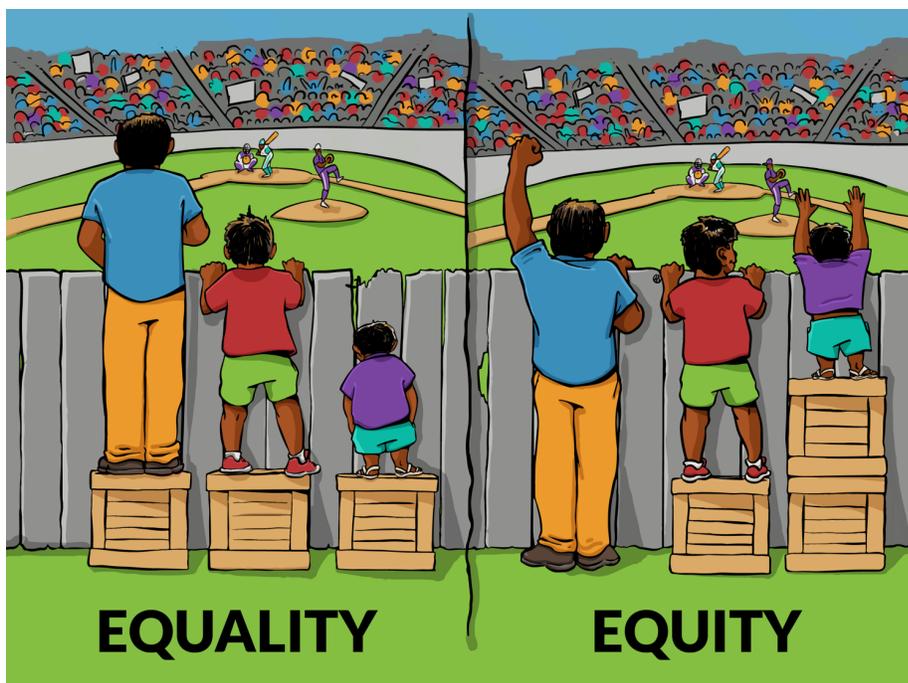
- yes this parable contradicts our contemporary labor practices, given that in our culture most people are paid by the hour.
- But perhaps this apparent injustice is in reality a "higher" justice: the justice of God.
- The parable does not provide us with a description of someone who is willing to give equal opportunity to people provided they show the same number of credentials, the same curriculum vitae, or the same experience.
- The story describes an employer whose criteria go beyond merit **to focus on need**.

- It takes into account that the one who shows up at the end may have been working elsewhere for lower than minimum wage and now finally has a boss who will see the burden he is carrying for his family here and in his country of origin as he divides his income to put food on 2 or 3 tables.
- Those who were hired late in the evening were not lazy, perhaps they just could not find employment for the day.
- In hiring them at such a late hour, the owner of the vineyard shows "interhuman" justice and mercy.
- The workers who came in late will now have enough money to buy food for their families.
- This reflects God's justice, mercy and grace toward humanity, and it calls the church to follow God's example, practicing justice and mercy in its daily life.

This reflects equity – generosity based on need, and not on equality.

It's like that cartoon that was circulating on social media...

Three people - one short, one medium height and one tall - standing outside a sport stadium straining to see the game.
 On the one side, equality, they are all given the same height block to stand on to see. The shortest, still can't see, the medium height person – barely.
 On the other side, equity... the tall person gets a small block, the medium height one a middle sized block and the shortest gets the largest block. All now see equally.



As most of us live in comparative privilege... what does it mean for us to live according to need?

Perhaps it is asking ourselves questions about our choices... and choosing to live simply?

Or exploring the minimalist movement....

For the sake of all of neighbours – humans and Earth.

The minimalist movement says:

See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_IqE-CF7fM

- **There's no one right way.**
- you need less than you think
- There is a relationship between minimalism and generosity: when we choose to own less we have more space and more resources to give away.
- Having less, shifts our desire to wanting more stuff. Less consumeristic... more content.
- It's a practice, a way of life.

Ways to Simplify Your Life:

<https://www.ecfvp.org/blogs/175/the-art-of-living-simply-making-more-of-less>

1. Decide what's most important to you. What do you value most?
2. List your current commitments and evaluate them in light of these values. What do you want to be doing with your precious time?
3. Simplify work tasks. Focus on the essential tasks and eliminate the rest.
4. Sort through your stuff. Pick a room or a closet or a work area and do a thorough purging. Separate into three piles: keep, give away, and trash.
5. Simplify your wardrobe. Give away things you haven't worn in the past year.
6. Limit your purchases. Buy less stuff. Ask yourself if you really need this and if you really need to own this before purchasing it.
7. Have a place for everything.
8. Limit your communications. Decide when and how much time you will devote to email, IM, phone calls, etc.
9. Eat slowly. Slow down to lose weight, improve digestion, and enjoy life more.
10. Spend time with the people you love.
11. Spend time alone. Learn to meditate.
12. Slow down. Live life more deliberately.

Today we stand with Julian of Norwich, asking for a seed of her courage to make hard choices for the sake of the world.