

St. Andrew's Sermons  
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Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

## **Gospel Economics**

A few weeks ago before a joint session of Congress, President Obama unveiled his plan to address the jobs crisis. We stand at just over nine percent unemployment, and everyone agrees that something must be done. The problem, of course, is that congressional Democrats and Republicans disagree about what that something is, and we can only hope that they find some common ground soon.

Given this context, it's interesting that today's gospel features a business owner. And not just any business owner; if you think that the Democrats are spending recklessly to prop up the economy I assure you they've got nothing on the guy in this story. He was a landowner who went out each day and hired workers for his vineyard. He hired some at 6:00, more at nine, some more at noon, still more at 3:00 and even more at 5:00. This guy was a like a one-man stimulus package. But who knows, maybe he just had a huge vineyard, with a lot of work to be done. If so, that's understandable. But what doesn't make sense is what happens next. The clock strikes six, the whistle blows, and the landowner proceeds to pay each worker – even the ones who'd only been there an hour – a full day's wage.

Now that's nonsense. It's bad financial management. If this guy keeps it up, his vineyard's going to fold in a few weeks. It's just unsustainable. It's also unfair. The ones who worked all day should get paid more, right? That's certainly how they felt, and they said so. They went straight to the landowner to complain. But listen to what he said: "I paid you the usual wage, just like we agreed. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"

You see, this story is not about what is fair or profitable. It's not really about jobs, and it's not even about money. It's about the landowner, and his actions don't translate in the economy of the world. They shouldn't, because they're meant to reflect a deeper reality. Listen again to the first line: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out to hire laborers." This story is not about the economics of the world; it's about the economics of the gospel. The economics of the

gospel is built not on scarcity but abundance. It is an economics of excess – not an excess of greed or debt or risk but rather an excess of generosity and invitation. It's an excess driven not by self-interest but by self-abdication. The landowner is clearly unconcerned with the bottom line because he's too busy gathering people in and giving money away.

The implication, of course, is that God's love is like that. God's love binds the kingdom of heaven together, and God's love, God's forgiveness, God's blessing comes to us in abundance. It is not selective or conditional, and it knows no bounds. God's love is overflowing and entirely self-giving, even to the point of death. That is the economics of the gospel.

In these difficult times, when work is hard to come by, when money seems tight, and when help is uncertain, this parable reminds us that there is always another economy. There is always around us and within us the promise of the kingdom of heaven, which is not just about life after death but is very much about this life. It's an invitation to experience today a life of abundant grace. It's the vision of a community where everyone is welcome, everyone is equal, and everyone has enough. It's the knowledge that come what may in the economy of the world, we will always remain excessively loved in God's economy. Such is the kingdom of heaven. Amen.