

Sermon: 17th Sunday After Pentecost/Pr. 20 - "God Keeps Showing Up"

Date/Time: Sunday, Sep 20th 2026 – 7:45a, 9:00a, 11:15a **Service:** Holy Eucharist Rite I & II

You know - some kinds of waiting wear us out.

You can spend a whole day waiting for a call, an answer, or some word about what happens next.

To anybody looking in, it may seem like you haven't done much at all.

But by evening, you're worn out.

I've been thinking about that as I've sat with today's Gospel.

Especially the people who were still standing in the marketplace at five o'clock.

By then, the day was almost over.

Other workers had been hired hours ago.

They'd gone off to the vineyard.

But these people were still there.

And when the landowner asked why, they said, "*Because no one has hired us.*"

That answer stopped me.

Earlier in the story, Jesus says the landowner found people standing idle in the marketplace.

And to our ears, idle can sound like lazy - like they had no interest in working.

But that isn't what they say when the landowner asks them.

They say, "*No one has hired us.*"

They don't say they came late.

They don't say they turned down work.

They came looking for it, and no one chose them.

Jesus doesn't tell us why.

Were they older?

Did they look less strong than the others?

Was there something about their bodies, or the way they spoke, or where they came from, that made somebody choose the person standing next to them instead?

Did they not have papers?

We don't know.

And I don't want to pretend that we do.

But I do want us to notice that they were there.

They had come to the marketplace looking for work, and by five o'clock, they were still waiting to be wanted.

Now, we usually come to this parable thinking about the wages. That's understandable.

By the end of the story, everybody receives the same pay, even though they haven't worked the same number of hours.

And some of us may already be thinking: Well, that isn't fair.

I get it.

But before we get to the pay, I want to stay in the marketplace a bit longer.

Because Jesus tells us that the landowner went out early in the morning and hired workers for his vineyard. Then he went out again around nine. And again at noon. And again at three. And then - at five o'clock - he went back.

Why?

He already had people working. Even if the vineyard needed more help earlier in the day, how much could a new group accomplish with so little daylight left?

Now, Jesus doesn't tell us what the landowner was thinking.

He does tell us there were still people standing there.

And the landowner came back for them.

Because God keeps showing up.

I wonder what that day felt like from their side of the marketplace.

At nine o'clock, they may still have thought they had a good chance.

At noon, the morning had slipped away.

By three, they might have begun to think about what they would take home that night - and what they wouldn't.

And still they stayed.

There's a kind of exhaustion in that waiting that we don't always recognize. Standing ready for work is not the same thing as working in the vineyard. I wouldn't claim that Jesus says it is. But they haven't spent the day doing nothing, either.

They've spent the day making themselves available, watching the hours pass, and hearing someone else be chosen again and again.

Some of us know a little bit about that kind of waiting.

Waiting for a job. Waiting for a diagnosis. Waiting for somebody to call us. Waiting for a child to come home. Waiting for a relationship to change, or for grief to ease enough that we can imagine the next day.

And sometimes the waiting itself takes everything we've got.

That's why I find myself looking at these workers and asking:

Is standing at the ready and waiting not a day's work?

Not in the sense that their waiting earns the landowner's generosity. It doesn't.

But in the sense that they, too, have had a long day.

The first workers have been in the vineyard, bearing the heat.

The last workers have spent hour after hour hoping someone will let them in.

And at five o'clock, there they still are.

That persistence has something to teach us.

They can't make anyone hire them.

They can't turn the clock back to morning.

But they remain open to the possibility that someone may still come.

That's what hope can look like when waiting has gone on longer than we expected.

It doesn't require us to feel cheerful about the wait.

It means we keep ourselves open to being called, even when we have begun to wonder whether the opportunity has passed.

When the landowner comes back, the workers are still there to hear him.

"Because no one has hired us," they say.

And he answers, *"You also go into the vineyard."*

You also.

I love those words.

Now, if Jesus ended the story there, I think we could all leave feeling pretty good about it.

The people nobody hired finally get a chance.

There's a place for them in the vineyard after all.

But Jesus keeps going.

At the end of the day, the landowner tells his manager to pay the workers - beginning with the last ones hired.

That is a curious choice, isn't it?

He could have paid the first workers first.

They could have collected their money and gone home without ever knowing what anyone else received.

Instead, they have to watch.

The five-o'clock workers step forward, and each receives the usual daily wage - a denarius.

We heard about denarii last Sunday: that's roughly a laborer's pay for a day's work.

So they got a full day's wage for one hour of work.

And when the workers who had been there since morning see that, they think - reasonably - that they'll receive more.

But they receive the same amount.

I can feel their disappointment - can't you?

They say to the landowner, *"These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."*

They have borne that burden. Their work was real. The heat was real. The landowner doesn't tell them otherwise.

He says, *"Friend, I am doing you no wrong."*

He had agreed with them on a day's wage, and he's paid it.

He's kept his word.

But then he says, *"I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you."*

The person still standing in the marketplace when the day was almost gone.

That person will go home with enough, too.

And that's the part that troubles the first workers.

They haven't lost what was promised to them - but now someone else has received it as well. Someone they watched work for only an hour has been made equal to them.

Jesus has brought us to a harder question than whether the landowner can calculate wages correctly.

What happens when we see God being generous to someone we thought should have to wait longer?

What happens when there is a place for them alongside us?

Jonah would have something to say about that.

We heard him this morning, angry because God has shown mercy to Nineveh.

And Jonah doesn't complain because God's behavior's a surprise.

He says, "*I knew you would do this.*"

He knows God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He just didn't want God to be that way toward "those people".

And God keeps speaking to Jonah, even in his anger.

God doesn't give up on him, either.

God keeps showing up.

For Jonah. For Nineveh.

For the workers hired first, who received what was promised.

And for the workers still waiting at five o'clock.

Last Sunday, we heard a story in which grace came first.

Before the servant could repay a debt he would never be able to repay, the king released him from it.

This Sunday, Jesus shows us something else:

Grace comes back.

At Nine o'clock. And at Noon. And Three. And at Five.

Grace comes back to the place where people are still standing.

And I think that's why the hour matters so much.

Five o'clock really is late. The workers know it. The landowner knows it.

Jesus lets us feel how little of the day is left.

But the Kingdom has a different way of telling time.

We look at the clock and think: there isn't enough time now.

Not enough time to be useful.

Not enough time to change how this day ends.

But, the landowner goes back to the marketplace.

Maybe that's the word some of us need to hear.

Because it's possible to begin believing it's too late for us - not just too late in the day, but too late in life.

Too late to find our place.
Too late to answer a call we didn't hear clearly before.
Too late to begin again.
Too late to hope that anything could be different.

This parable doesn't tell us that all our waiting will end by tonight, or that every door we've stood before will open.

I wouldn't ask you to believe that.

But, it does give us a reason to remain open to the One who comes.

The workers' persistence is not what makes the landowner return.

He chooses to go back.

But when he does, they're still there to hear him say, "You also."

We need to see the Church's life in that.

We're the people who wait. Not always patiently. Certainly not without getting tired.

But we keep gathering, praying, serving, and making room for one another because we trust the promise of the One who comes to us.

In a few minutes, at this Table, we will proclaim the mystery of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

We say it every Sunday.

And some Sundays, I need to hear that last part again.

Christ will come again.

That's why we can keep watch!

My Friends, we don't know the hour.

And we can't make Christ come by doing enough.

The reason we keep watch is because we've come to know something of the One for whom we wait.

The Kingdom has a different way of telling time.

It is five o'clock - the day's not over.

And God is still coming down the road.

Amen.