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A little over 10 years ago, two zoologists at Emory University, Sarah Brosnan and Frans de Waal, decided to study the evolution of fairness. They wanted to explore where our distaste for unfairness comes from. Is it cultural, or is it hardwired?

So, they designed an experiment using capuchin monkeys. A pair of monkeys were placed in adjacent cages where they could see each other. Capuchins love cucumbers so they were trained to give small granite rocks to their human handler for a piece of cucumber as a reward.

Both monkeys found this arrangement satisfactory and handed over their rocks with enthusiasm. But then, the handler changed things up. After a few fair and even exchanges, the handler rewarded the first monkey with a chunk of cucumber as usual, but gave the second monkey a grape which is the equivalent of fine wine or caviar in the monkey world.

Seeing that the game had changed for the better, the first monkey perked up, and very eagerly handed over another rock, expecting, of course, to receive a grape, too. But no, the handler gave her another piece of cucumber. To make things worse, the handler then gave the second monkey another grape for free!

The results, which are on YouTube, were striking. The first monkey just about lost her mind. Not only did she refuse to eat the cucumber; she hurled it at the handler's face. She then proceeded to bang against the bars of the cage, throwing her remaining rocks in every direction, and making furious gestures at her grape-eating companion.

The experiment has been repeated using other primates and animals, and the results have been astonishingly similar. Scientists have also studied the development of fairness in human babies and found that infants as young as nine months old will react quite strongly and negatively to perceived unfairness. Clearly, as Brosnan and De Waal concluded after their experiment, fairness is a concept that is deeply rooted in the human psyche.

All this leads to this morning's gospel. How many of us think it's fair for a person who only works one hour for the entire day to receive the exact same pay as someone who has worked nine hours? I don't think any of us sitting here believe that is fair. We resent anyone who would get the same pay as we for less work. After all, we know what fairness is, and we know how it's supposed to play out. Equal pay for equal work is fair. Equal pay for unequal work is NOT fair.

For many in our culture fairness is the highest ethical stance. Some would even choose fairness over love. Children see fairness as the standard. They are especially keen on fairness if they believe that they have been treated unfairly. All parents and grandparents are familiar with the cry of outrage, "That's not fair!" or "all the other kids get to..."

However, children and then we as adults seldom raise the issue of fairness when we're the ones being favored. In fact, almost no one raises the issue of fairness when we are favored or privileged. And I believe we would all agree that most problems are identified as "fairness" problems. It isn't fair I got cancer, it isn't fair I got laid off; it isn't fair she makes more money than I. We all know that life isn't fair but we want it to be

fair, at least, according to our standards. So when we are hit with the unfairness of life, it is easy to fill our hearts and life with resentment.

That is what happened in the parable. The people who had agreed at the beginning of the day to work for a day's wage received what they had agreed too. However, they became resentful because those that came late in the day received the same wage as well.

Most of us put ourselves in the shoes of the first group of people and we too would grumble. "Why do those people get the same wage as us when they worked less hours?" "How come we had to bear the heat of the day and they didn't?" "What a terrible boss! He should have given us more or them less". But think about it. Why are we grumbling? Didn't we receive what we agreed to receive? So, then our grumbling is rooted in unfairness, resentment and jealousy!!

Now most of us don't identify with the Johnny come lately workers. But put yourself in their shoes for a moment. Ask yourselves why is it late in the day before they're hired. Think about it as happening today. Perhaps the late starters have been looking for work all day and finally got hired. Perhaps they aren't as literate, educated, or skilled as their competitors. Perhaps they have learning challenges, or a tough home life, or children to care for at home. Perhaps they don't own cars, or don't speak the language. Perhaps they struggle with depression or anxiety. Perhaps employers refuse to hire them because they're gay, or trans, or disabled, or female or black, Hispanic or whatever ethnicity. There are many reasons why they possibly were not hired till late in the day. Now the landowner in Jesus's story doesn't judge his workers by their hours. He doesn't obsess over why some workers are able to start at dawn and others are not.

Think of it this way. The fact that the employer is generous and gives you, the last chosen worker, the same amount as everyone else allows you to perhaps meet the needs of your family for a day. If the boss had given you less you wouldn't have enough to live on. So, the question is why don't we rejoice at the good fortune of those who were able to work late in the day and feed their family for the day?

Why can't we rejoice at the generosity of the boss? He was extravagant in his generosity. That is the surprising part of this story. Look how many times he kept going back to the marketplace and hiring people! He went out at 9am, noon, 3 and five. Look at how many people he put to work giving them a fair wage! That is something to celebrate! But we are always more likely to begrudge the luck of others. We are worried that someone is getting something for nothing because that's how we are. This parable puts the spotlight on us and shows up our human tendency toward envy, resentment and wanting people to get what they deserve according to our terms.

We also have to realize that this parable is about the Kingdom of Heaven. It begins, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like....The parable is about God's way. It is basically about God's dealings with us and God's merciful and extravagant love toward all of us. Certainly, by our standards, people are not equal in their economic, political or social status. Society makes distinctions concerning whom or what is of more value and less value. Yet according to God's standards every human being is precious in God's sight. Throughout his life, Jesus seems to have dealt equally with all: rich, poor, employers, laborers, priests, royalty, outcasts, prodigals, tax collectors, women, children, everyone. He loved everyone, without making distinctions. God totally shatters our human

standards of fairness and justice by giving each one of us God's love and grace: without us having to work for it or deserve it.

It is like the story of a manager of a hotel where the Sultan of Brunei had stayed and left a \$17,000 tip for the hotel staff. Now the manager of the hotel decided to divide the amount equally among all of the hotel's 320 employees. So, each worker received \$531.

But there was a lot of grumbling among some of the employees when the manager made that decision. After all, many of those workers didn't even have contact with the Sultan but they received the exact same amount as those who actually did the work. And some of the people who shared in that tip didn't even work during the five days the Sultan stayed. But even so, they got to share in that act of generosity just like all the rest.

So often we think in terms of what we deserve from God. We figure that we have paid our dues, and so we expect God to reward us for our efforts. We don't want to hear about God treating us all alike.

It's like the Dennis the Menace cartoon that depicted Dennis and his friend, Joey, leaving Mrs. Wilson's house with their hands full of cookies. Puzzled, Joey says, "I wonder what we did to deserve this." Dennis answers, "Look, Joey, Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we're nice, but because she's nice."

God gives us grace not because we deserve grace, but because that is God's nature. We forget that God gives each one of us an equal measure of God's love and grace, whether we deserve it or not. We are all equal in God's eyes. Therefore, in another sense, we are also like the workers who worked only one hour. When we look at our lives and see what God has done for us; what God has given us in spite of our blunderings; in spite of our many faults and failures; we then realize how wonderful it is to receive God's gift of love and grace. In spite of everything, God loves and accepts us no matter what we do or fail to do to deserve it. When we begrudge others that generosity, it is only because we have forgotten how generous God has been toward us. Thank God we do not get what we deserve. We get far better than that. Now that's Good News! Amen.