

## God is Good Beyond Measure

20 September 2020

Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

*Verse 15:*

*The landowner turns to the worker. Are you jealous because I am generous?*

Voted 53rd best movie of all time, *Amadeus* tells the story of Antonio Salieri (a contemporary of Mozart) and his confession of being overwhelmed with jealousy by all the gifts God had given to Amadeus Mozart. Antonio is a composer himself but his music, despite his best efforts, has none of the musical genius of Mozart. Speaking to God, Antonio complains, “You choose for your instrument a boastful, lustful, smutty infantile boy … and give me for reward only the ability to recognize the incarnation. Because you are unjust, unfair, unkind, I will block you. I swear it. I will hinder and harm your creature as far as I am able. I will ruin your incarnation.” To this God could reply with today’s verse, “Are you jealous because I am generous?”

God is good beyond all measure and Jesus tells today’s Gospel story to show God’s generosity at work.

There’s a big vineyard and day labourers are needed to pick the harvest. Many families lived from hand to mouth and needed the work.

The first group agrees on the day’s pay and they work from dawn to dusk. Other teams start later the day. “I’ll pay you whatever is right,” the owner promises a third group, a fourth and finally, near the end of the day, a fifth group, heightening the building tension in the story - how much they will get paid?

To make matters worse the last group are paid first. They get paid a full day’s wage. Finally, the dawn workers get paid and they get paid the same as all the others.

We can hear the grumbling from here. “It’s favouritism!” they would complain, “I worked all through the heat of the day and got the same pay. It’s unjust, its corruption...” The key is verse 15, “Are you jealous because I’m generous?” You bet we are!

But Jesus would have known the need of the workers to support their families was the same whenever they got employed.

Jesus isn’t offering this parable as an employment seminar. Rather he is using the story to shock us out of our jealousy and to tell us about God’s nature.

God is good beyond all human measure. God blesses us above and beyond what is just. God’s economy is an economy of grace.

It’s one thing to say God is good. But how? I want to share three ways God is good.

**God is good beyond measure in forgiving us.** We tire of asking for forgiveness before God tires of forgiving us.

Corrie ten Boom had more reason to be unforgiving than most. A Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom knew the importance of forgiveness. In her book *Tramp for the Lord* she says her favourite mental picture was of forgiven sins thrown into the sea. “When we confess our sins, God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. I believe God then places a sign out there that says *No Fishing Allowed*.”

She points to an important truth that believers in Jesus can sometimes fail to grasp– when God forgives our wrongdoing, we’re forgiven fully! We don’t have to keep dredging up our shameful deeds, wallowing in any mucky feelings. Rather we can accept God’s grace and forgiveness and follow Jesus into freedom.

God is good beyond measure because he is always ready to forgive us.

**God is good beyond measure creating this world to be our home.** In the search for life on other planets scientists have begun to calculate just how lucky it is that life exists at all. There are so many variables that need to be just right. We need to be just the right distance from the sun. Not too hot and not too cold. If it's too hot we burn up, if it's too cold we freeze. Earth is perfectly placed in the Goldilocks zone. We get just the right amount of gravity, just the right amount of oxygen, water, and the list goes on. The probability that life exists at all is  $1.7 \times 10^{-11}$  (about 1 in 60 billion). It's more likely that we all win lotto. Even the most reluctant scientist is finding it hard to say this happened simply by accident.

God is good because he has created this world to be our home.

**God is good because he gives us a caring community.**

For all its shortfalls the church is still a storehouse of grace: *So many times, a person has come to me in great need and found at church the grace they need. On one occasion the local desperate district nurse came knocking. She had exhausted all other avenues of funding to fix some patients' broken windows. Broken windows meant drafts and children with colds and no security at night. So, I asked a few at church and by the next day that nurse left here with more than enough money. But she left with more than money she left with tears in her eyes, for that simple act of kindness.*

Without counting the cost, God continues to give us unmerited love.

So, what are we to do? How are we to live in this world that makes us jealous often and doesn't seem to value what we, the people of God, bring to it. To us Mother Teresa of Calcutta would offer these words:

*People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centred, forgive them anyway.*

*If you succeed you will win some unfaithful friends and make some enemies, succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you, be honest and sincere anyway.*

*What you have spent years creating others will destroy overnight, create anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness some may be jealous, be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.*

*Give the best you have, and it will never be enough, give your best anyway.*

*In the final analysis it is between you and God,  
it was never between you and them anyway.*

Forgiveness, a beautiful world and a grace filled community, these are just some of the gifts our good God pours upon us so we have no need to be jealous, even if it makes for a really good movie.