

We Don't Get What We Deserve -April 19, 2015
By Wayne J. Schneider - Soli Deo Gloria

We Don't Get What We Deserve St. Matthew 20:1-16

Thanks to the musical "Evita" by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Time Rice, I was introduced to Eva Peron. She died when I was eight years old. She was not elected to a single political office, had received no formal education, and though professionally an actress, she was not a good one. Yet, for a brief span, she held the world in her hands.

After Juan Peron was elected president of Argentina in 1946, his wife, Eva, became the "first lady." She was an illegitimate child from the back woods who dreamed about becoming powerfully successful in the big city. She had arrived.

Traditionally, the first lady was elected chairperson of the "Society of Beneficence," a kind of 'ladies aid society' that took care of the country's social and charitable work. Because of her background, Eva was not elected. The upper class society ladies could not abide the fact of her 'dirty' background.

Eva, undeterred by this rejection, developed her own organization that became one of the most acknowledged charities of all time, reaching almost everyone in Argentina. This action raised her to sainthood prior to her death even though the society women continued to hate her.

Unfortunately, there has always been a human pecking order.

And because of this it often blinds us to seeing people who we think are somehow 'beneath' us. We feel like we have certain rights or a certain status and we question anyone who might challenge our position.

It is at this point that we are presented with today's Gospel lesson, the parable of the workers in the vineyard. It is only in this gospel that the parable is found. St. Matthew likes to begin the parables of Jesus' with, "*The Kingdom ad Heaven is like* "

A while ago a bunch of biblical scholars got together to try and determine which passages of scripture Jesus might have actually spoken, and which may have been changed or added to by someone else. This group's name was "The Jesus Seminar." When they looked at today's gospel lesson they concluded that the words of Jesus were authentic, beyond doubt. A portion of their rationale was it's unashamed opposition to who was in and who was out.

Jesus told a story right out of today's marketplace. I'm sure you have seen this scene play out before: you are driving past Home Depot and there is a group of men standing outside before the store opens. They are 'day workers' looking for a job. Society sees them as low on the pay scale and therefore low on the social scale. Its common today and it was common in Jesus' day.

Periodically, the landowner hires more workers. There is nothing radical or noteworthy until it is time to pay the workers. Those who were hired last get paid first and what is shocking is that everyone receives a full day's pay. Can you picture the protests and the body language?

The "Me first!" philosophy did not begin in the 70's. "*Hey! I should get more since I worked more!*" It's understandable, if you work twelve hours you should get more than someone who worked only one hour. After all, we are all good capitalists, aren't we?

Except.

Except that's not how things go in God's world. Jesus says, "*The Kingdom of Heaven is like this.*" This parable is fascinating because of the way it frankly challenges how our society operates. Old 'Blue Eyes' "*I did it my way*" never really works. Perhaps this is the point of Jesus. Our way may not be God's way and it may be beneficial for us to notice that.

The gospel of Matthew was written to a church struggling with membership issues. Devout Jews with generational histories who now believed Jesus was the Messiah, had difficulty accepting non-Jews, outsiders, "them."

It is within this matrix where the church is raising a ruckus regarding newcomers that Jesus gives this story saying '*it does not matter how or when you arrived, God loves you and is ready to give you what you need.*'

Perhaps you have experienced this yourself. Someone comes to church, they are new, and they are accepted, treated well, maybe better than some saints who have been here a long time. Their past might just include sowing some wild oats, not caring for anyone but themselves, and they seem to step on the toes of some hardworking, straight-laced, saints who have been around a long time. Sometimes it seems so unfair.

But to God it does not. Because God's business is grace.

Often, we can agree that we are unworthy of God's love, and still God continues to give it. We cannot earn it, ever. It is a gift. We don't fight for it. We don't work hard to earn

it. We don't have to obey laws to deserve it. We already have it. Love knows this. And God smothers others, too. Even the ones we may not feel are as deserving as we are. But all of us receive it. Alleluia. Amen.