

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”
Matthew 20:15

Obviously, the Bible verse above is part of a larger story. Does anyone know, simply by reading the verse, which story Jesus is telling? (If you do, you can be my partner in Bible trivia!)

In my New Revised Standard Version Bible, the story is called “The Laborers in the Vineyard.” It’s the story of workers hired throughout the day (9 am, noon, 3 pm, 5 pm). As evening sets in, the owner of the vineyard pays everyone for a full day’s work. As one can imagine, there is a fair amount of grumbling among those who started early in the day. But the owner of the vineyard (clearly the God-figure in the story) says, “I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

We often use the word “grace” to describe the vineyard owner’s actions and therefore to describe the essence of God, but let’s pause for a moment on the word “generous.” What does it mean to be generous? In addition to the owner of the vineyard, who taught you what it looks like to be generous?

If we learned about generosity at a young age, most of us learned it from our parents or grandparents. I certainly did. When I wrecked the family minivan, my dad said, “Come to dinner.” The one time I asked for money during seminary (through tears and apologies), my parents sent me four times what I asked for. When I was very young and watched my mom pay the bills, I learned it wasn’t always easy, but being generous was a priority. This hasn’t changed. At 89 years old, she is still prioritizing the work of her church, world hunger, and whatever else moves her heart.

How about you? In addition to the owner of the vineyard, who taught you to be generous? How did you learn what generosity looks like?

I realize generosity is a welcome topic for some, but not for others. Talking about generosity requires us to be vulnerable, to share stories, and to reflect on our values. It asks us to consider where we’ve been and where we’re headed, for even generosity is a journey. But for all its challenges, I wonder: If people don’t embark on this journey at a young age...if they don’t learn about generosity from their parents or grandparents, where will they learn it? ***And if people don’t understand generosity, will they ever really understand grace?***

Over the next several weeks, we will focus on the theme “...*Called and sent to love and serve...with generosity.*” We will hear each other’s stories, share information, and reflect on our values. We’ll notice what God is up to among us. As we do, please reflect on your family values and your own place in the process. Consider how you are part of God’s work in the world. When it comes to generosity, think about where you’ve been, where you’re headed, and how you might get there...for even generosity is a journey.

From one wayfarer to another,

Pastor Caroline