

Sermon Note: Living in God's Economy

First Sunday of Advent

Introduction

Welcome to our Advent series, based on Matt Rawle's book *The Redemption of Scrooge*, where we explore how God's grace transforms even the most unlikely among us. As we prepare for Christmas, this series will take us on a journey through themes of redemption, hope, and love. We begin with "Living in God's Economy." In our text for this week, Jesus shares the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, a story that challenges our assumptions about fairness and rewards. God's economy values grace over merit, abundance over scarcity. This week, we consider what it means to live in this divine economy as we contrast Scrooge's stingy worldview with God's lavish generosity.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NM3xkUuOzo>

In this clip from *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992), Scrooge's nephew Fred visits, bringing a spirit of Christmas.

Why This Video?

This scene sets the stage for contrasting Scrooge's worldview with God's economy. Fred's joyful celebration of Christmas highlights generosity, while Scrooge's dismissiveness and refusal to support charity reflect a perspective rooted in scarcity and self-interest. The charity workers' appeal underscores the biblical call to live generously, as seen in Matthew 20:1-16. This video invites us to explore what it means to embrace God's abundant grace and reflect that grace in how we live and give.

Video Discussion Questions

1. How does Scrooge's reaction to Fred and the charity workers illustrate the priorities of the world's economy?
2. How might Fred's joy and generosity align with God's values in Matthew 20:1-16?
3. Scrooge seems to fear losing his wealth. What fears hold us back from living generously?
4. What parallels can you find between Scrooge's attitudes and the grumbling laborers in the parable?
5. How does this clip challenge us to examine our understanding of abundance?

Matthew 20:1-16 (CEB)

¹"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ²After he agreed with the workers to pay them a denarion, he sent them into his vineyard.

³"Then he went out around nine in the morning and saw others standing around the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I'll pay you whatever is right.' ⁵And they went.

“Again around noon and then at three in the afternoon, he did the same thing. ⁶Around five in the afternoon he went and found others standing around, and he said to them, ‘Why are you just standing around here doing nothing all day long?’

⁷“Because nobody has hired us,’ they replied.

“He responded, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’

⁸“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and give them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on finally to the first.’ ⁹When those who were hired at five in the afternoon came, each one received a denarion. ¹⁰Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarion. ¹¹When they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²“These who were hired last worked one hour, and they received the same pay as we did even though we had to work the whole day in the hot sun.’

¹³“But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I did you no wrong. Didn’t I agree to pay you a denarion? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go. I want to give to this one who was hired last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Don’t I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I’m generous?’ ¹⁶So those who are last will be first. And those who are first will be last.”

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. What words or phrases from Matthew 20:1-16 catch your attention? Why?
2. How does the parable challenge the fairness we often seek in the world?
3. The landowner’s actions represent God’s grace. What do you think it means that all workers received the same reward, regardless of when they started?
4. In what ways do we see the values of this parable reflected (or ignored) in society today?
5. When life feels overwhelming or scarce, what helps you stay grounded in God’s abundance?
6. How can this Advent season be a time for examining your values and aligning them with God’s economy?

Weekly Action

This week, practice generosity by looking for ways to give, not out of obligation, but out of gratitude for God’s grace. Whether it’s donating to a charity, volunteering your time, or reaching out to someone in need, consider how your actions mirror God’s abundant love.

Prayer

God of grace and abundance, When our hearts are weighed down by scarcity and fear, remind us of your overflowing generosity. When we cling to what we have, open our hands to share your blessings with others. Help us to live in your economy of love, where grace is unearned and freely given. As we light the Advent candle of hope, kindle in us the hope that your kingdom is here, now, and coming. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

Disclosure: This Sermon Note was created by LJUMC staff with the support of AI tools.