



## **“The Realm of God is Like This” Part 3**

### **The Labourers in the Vineyard**

Wildwood Mennonite Church // July 5, 2020

Worship Leader: Rick E // Music Leader: Marg E // Sermon: Sean B

#### **Welcome to Wildwood...**

...or rather, thanks for welcoming us into wherever you are in this at-home worship format.

This is not where we thought we'd be this summer! We are grateful for the familiar patterns and relationships that we have been able to resume, yet we are still grieving the loss of those that have changed and we are still feeling our way through the murkiness of whatever it is that is emerging.

As people of faith, we trust that God is present in all of those spaces: in the familiar, in the grieving, in the unknown. And we are grateful that you have joined us in this place, a reminder that we never walk alone. Welcome.

Good morning wherever you are and welcome to the Zoomwood Mennonite Church service. Are we used to this yet? Many people are saying that this work-from-home or on-line way of life is the new way to live and they like it. Some churches may make this a regular feature whether there is an open sanctuary or not. Well, maybe it is my age but I'm not so sure. I'd still like to have coffee with you after the service and even if I don't contribute much musically I'd still like to hear you all singing around me.

But this is our service today so welcome here and I hope you find the next hour a blessing that enhances your day and days to follow.

**Music For Meditation // [Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service](#) // Hymnal Worship Book #369**

#### **Call to Worship**

O God, author of eternal light,  
Lead us in our worshipping this day:  
That our lips may praise you,  
Our lives may bless you,  
And our meditations glorify you,  
Through Christ our Lord. AMEN



## Peace Candle

This past Wednesday many of us celebrated, or at least acknowledged, our nation's birthday. Our nationhood. Our transition from a British colony to an independent country.

Others did not. They took the day to address and highlight the many failures, shortcomings, and wrongs of Canadian governments, policies, and society.

Both positions have some merit. Canada is a good place to be for many. Canada can also be a better place to be for many others.

May our candle today illuminate both the good and the bad in our nation and light the way to a Canada that is better for all its people.

## Offering Prayer

We cannot pass the green bags around as we would like to do but offerings are being received by cheques mailed to the church office or by e-transfer.

O God, to those who have hunger, give bread,  
And to those who have bread, give hunger for justice. AMEN

## Song // [Open My Ears](#) // Sing the Story #5

## Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Don!](#)

Today's story is [What Do You Do With a Chance?](#) by Kobi Yamada and illustrated by Mae Besom.


## Scripture // Matthew 20:1-16 (The Inclusive Bible translation)

*"The kingdom of heaven is like the owner of an estate who went out at dawn to hire workers for the vineyard. After reaching an agreement with them for the usual daily wage, the owner sent them out to the vineyard.*

*"About mid-morning, the owner came out and saw others standing around the marketplace without work, and said to them, 'You go along to my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is fair.' At that they left.*

*"Around noon and again in the mid-afternoon, the owner came out and did the same. Finally, going out late in the afternoon, the owner found still others standing around and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?'*

*"'No one has hired us,' they replied.*



*“The owner said, ‘You go to my vineyard, too.’*

*“When evening came, the owner said to the overseer, ‘Call the workers and give them their pay, but begin with the last group and end with the first.’ When those hired late in the afternoon came up, they received a full day’s pay, and when the first group appeared they assumed they would get more. Yet they all received the same daily wage.*

*“Thereupon they complained to the owner, ‘This last group did only an hour’s work, but you’ve put them on the same basis as those who worked a full day in the scorching heat.’*

*“ ‘My friends,’ said the owner to those who voiced this complaint, ‘I do you no injustice. You agreed on the usual wage, didn’t you? Take your pay and go home. I intend to give this worker who was hired last the same pay as you. I’m free to do as I please with my money, aren’t I? Or are you envious because I am generous?’*


*“Thus the last will be first and the first will be last.”*

### **Sermon // “The Labourers in the Vineyard” // Sean Baergen**

(If you’d rather watch than read, [click here for the full video version](#) on youtube)

Good morning. My name is Sean Baergen and I use the pronouns He/Him. Today we are looking at the parable of the workers in the vineyard. I chose this one because, while not unfamiliar, it’s not one of the first parables that comes to mind. Secondly, it’s one of a few parables that Jesus actually tells us the meaning at the end. Personally, I like this. Don’t make me have to analyze it or look up the original greek to try and determine its quote true meaning. Just tell me what you mean so I can move on. Clean and simple! So what is this message? “Thus the last will be first and the first will be last”. This is a message that I guess many of us have heard thousands of times growing up, that I suspect many of us gloss over this phrase and just assume we know what it means. But I wonder how many of us have actually stopped to consider the implications this one, simple statement has on our lives. When I started to delve into this statement more, I quickly came up with three main questions. Who is the first, who is the last, and what does it mean to make the first last and the last first in our 21st century society? When we start to think about these questions, we realize that (surprise, surprise), it’s not so clean and simple after all.

Before I begin, I would just like to say that I am still, and always will be, learning about my privilege. I recognize that I have many blind spots and I ask for your grace today as I try to voice my feelings about privilege and how best to work for a more equitable world. I ask that, if I say anything that you find hurtful, please know that it is not intentional and please reach out to me to let me know where I can do better.




With that being said, let's start with our first question, who is the first? I start with who is the first instead of the last because I think too often we focus on who is the last and forget to identify who is the first. Forgetting to answer this question can abdicate us of responsibility since, if we identify the last as the poor, we can quickly say the rich is first, and then just assume that the "rich" are those who have more than us, since there are always those we can look to who have more than us. Instead, if we look at who the "first" is in the parable, we see it's not some rich, powerful people. Instead, the first are day labourers. In fact, the first and the last are day labourers. These are people, usually men, who would show up early in the morning at the town's marketplace, and wait until someone hired them for the day. They didn't have a steady job or a large inheritance. They woke up every day wondering if there would be work for them and getting paid a normal day's wage each day. Their "first-ness" came from them being hired in the morning to work a full day.

So this begs the question of where does our "first-ness" come from (Today we tend to use the word privilege)?

To do this, we need to identify those things that, big or small, help us progress through life. For example, just some of my privileges would be I'm white, male, cis-gender, heterosexual, and college educated. I was also lucky enough to grow up in an affluent household, in Canada, with two parents who were able to take time off work to drive me and my siblings to wherever we needed to be. These are all things that have helped me move through life more easily and get to where I am now. These are all things that make up a "first-ness" that I must be cognizant about.

I also want to say that I am sure there are many privileges I have that, because of the very fact that I have them, I don't realize that they are there. For example, before I heard of Black Lives Matters in 2013, I didn't know that, by being white, I was less likely to be stopped by a police officer and, if I was stopped, I was much less likely to end up being injured or killed in that interaction. That is an ignorance that I must own up to. Which brings me to another point. The process of identifying your privileges might not be a comfortable one. For me, my privileges lead me to have a relatively comfortable life. The very fact that there is a privilege, suggests that these aspects of our lives provide us comfort. However, there is the flip side of this statement. By virtue of not having a privilege, it very likely provides dis-comfort. Therefore, to truly get at the heart of our privilege, we must dive into that dis-comfort. Looking back at the parable, I find it interesting that the owner specifically told the overseer to give the pay to the last workers first and the first workers last. The whole issue could have been avoided by just giving the first workers their pay first, and then they would never need to know that they were being paid the same as the rest of the workers. Instead, the owner forces this conflict to happen. Similarly, we must embrace the awkward conversation with someone we hurt. We must listen to those that bring attention to issues we weren't aware of. We must educate ourselves about the inconvenient truths that we silence with our comfort. We must be uncomfortable.



Therefore, my first challenge to everyone is to take some time, get uncomfortable, and identify any privileges you have in your life, earned or unearned. On top of this, do some research to try and identify those hidden privileges you might not be aware of. Now you may be thinking that this will be one giant self-imposed guilt-trip, but I challenge you to move beyond the guilt. I think that often we can sit in that guilt and get stuck there, but we need to move beyond that guilt and towards actions. I have attached two potential starting points to the online worship materials that can help us start thinking about privilege and some tactics to use when discussing privilege.

[30+ Examples of Middle-to-Upper Class Privileges - It's Pronounced Metrosexual](#)  
[Why it's Important to Think About Privilege - and Why it's Hard](#)

So now that we know where our “first-ness” comes from, we can attempt to identify how this relates to who is the “last”. Let me start by saying that I cringe at that sentence. The language of first and last implies a ranking. Someone is “better” than someone else. I believe that this view undercuts the message of the parable since, even by reversing it to “the last will be first”, there is still an order. However, if we actually look at the parable, this isn’t what is happening at all. The workers who worked all day are not brought below the other workers. Instead, all the workers are brought to the same level. It is a common interpretation of this parable that Jesus is speaking into the division between Jews and Gentiles. In the Old Testament, we see the Jews as being “God’s people”. Jews were the people who grew up following the laws of Moses. If anyone would be “first” in the eyes of God, it would be them. But Jesus is outwardly rejecting that. Even though Gentiles have come to faith later than Jews, they are still welcome as equal members of the kingdom of God. Note they are not greater than the Jews, but they are all equal in the eyes of God. So, keeping this in mind, it is clear that this is not so much about reversing the order, but creating a more equal world. So in the previous language where we identified our privileges, we must look at those who don’t have those privileges, and why this disparity exists.

That leads me to reframe the final question. Instead of asking how we can make the first last and the last first, we should ask how we can make the first equal to the last. In the context of privilege, we need to start with our initial task of identifying what privileges we have. As part of this, we need to examine why we have these privileges, and why the privilege exists in the first place. From here we can begin to work to dismantle the structures supporting the separation of privileged versus non-privileged. For example, I have the privilege of being white. This is because of my skin appearance. Why is the fact of me being white a privilege? Well one reason is because our society has systems in place built on racism that value my life over someone who is not white. This is one of the roots of the problem that needs to be addressed. If I had just stopped at saying “I have privilege because I am white”, I would have no path forward. I think many people, including me, just stop at this level and then, without any clear actions that can be taken, at best throw money at the problem or, at worst, become overwhelmed and end off doing nothing. By identifying an underlying cause, I can look into how to dismantle these systems. This is where, again, we must take the time to educate

ourselves, listen to those speaking out, and learn how best to spend our resources.

These are not easy things to think about. Nor should they be. Jesus' message is not one of comfort, but of disruption. To live the status quo is to ignore the injustices that the status quo relies on. We are currently living in a unique time where everything we do is being re-thought and re-imagined. In this parable, Jesus calls us to embrace this re-imagining and take it beyond how to get groceries safely or how to interact with other people safely. We must look at ourselves and see what privileges we benefit from. We must look at how these privileges hurt others, and we must look to educate ourselves and then act to disrupt the systems that seek to keep the first and the last apart. Let us go forward with God's grace and guidance, learning and acting, in pursuit of bringing peace and justice to our world. Amen.

**Song // [Make Me a Channel of Your Peace](#) // Sing the Journey #56**

**Sharing Time // ["Hey Wildwood..." online sharing](#)**

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. It's not the same, but one way to express your grief, anxiety, prayer requests and gratitude is through the "Hey Wildwood" link above. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

**Congregational Prayer**

Most holy God,  
The source of all good desires,  
All right judgments,  
And all just works:  
Give to us, your servants,  
That peace which the world cannot give,  
So that our minds may be fixed on the doing of your will,  
And that we, being delivered from the fear of all enemies,  
May live in peace and quietness;  
Through the mercies of Christ Jesus, our Savior. AMEN

**Song // [You are Salt for the Earth](#) // Hymnal Worship Book #226**



## **Benediction**

Guide us, O Lord,  
By your Word and Holy Spirit,  
That in your light we may see light,  
In your truth find freedom,  
And in your will discover peace,  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN

