

Reflection by Julie Simonton

When I was four years old, a beloved, impressively sassy aunt suddenly raced in front of me to get through a screen door. The door followed her and slammed to with a reverberating snap. It was the kind of snap that anyone who has lived through an August afternoon in Georgia knows well ... one that somehow seems to echo through the soupy afternoon air and come back to pop you again seconds later.

The noise scared me. The door scared me. And the blur of her running past scared me. As I voiced a four-year-old's indignance, I'll never forget her yelling over her shoulder with a raucous laugh, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first." And off she went ...

At the time I didn't realize she was quoting Jesus to me. It certainly didn't feel like Jesus. But it stuck — like a swollen screen door in the middle of a sweltering Georgia afternoon — the Bible verse stuck. And there is some Jesus in that.

At first glance, today's parable smacks of unfairness, rubbing against our most basic understanding of justice and equality. How unfair for the laborers to work disproportionate hours but receive the same pay! The indignance raised by those

Continued on reverse side >>

Proper 20 | Matthew 20:1-16
September 24, 2017



Reflection Questions

- How do you understand the similarities and differences between justice and grace?
- When have you experienced wage inequality? How did you respond?
- What is your first memory of a Bible verse?

Learn more at:
www.thediocese.net

Continued from the reverse side >>

who toiled for hours through the blazing, steamy day is indeed logical, and it seems irreproachably right. No one can dispute the injustice when basic economic principles are applied to the parable.

Jesus' landowner, however, didn't run his disbursement system through a biblical accounting agency. Neither does God. Which is Jesus' point here.

God shows no partiality, regardless of the time of day a person hears God's call to come and tend the vines. God promises us our daily bread — which in the economy of this parable was one denarius. One denarius for each of God's children. Regardless. This is God's radical equality, God's radical justice, God's radical grace. It is the radical generosity God not only offers to each of us, but models so that we know how to walk out the door into God's Kingdom (or pick up a pen to complete a pledge card) and multiply God's gifts, too.

A beloved Christian mystic, John O'Donahue, wrote a sentence that has stuck with me like the verse from my screen-door-slamming aunt: "The more you have, the more everyone has."

And there's a whole lot of Jesus in that.



Julie Simonton is the diocesan staff officer for congregational development and stewardship.

She especially delights in church parking lot conversations when the Holy Spirit begins to bubble and folks authentically engage with where Jesus is calling us to use the gifts God gives us to do the work God call us to do.

She and her family attend St. Stephen's in Richmond.

