Sermon *How to Surrender Uncertainty to God*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 9.20.26

Exodus 16:2-15
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45
Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-16

I talked to twenty people this week about today's Gospel lesson – the parable of the workers who were hired at 8 a.m. and those hired at 5 p.m. and they all got paid the same amount. None of them liked the parable. They said it isn't fair; and they are correct, it's not fair, and I think that's the point and the Good News.

My professor of Constructive Theology wrote a book titled, The Divine Economy. She asserted (correctly, in my opinion) that Jesus talked about the Divine Economy while we are living with the earthly or human economy. In the earthly economy, any landowner who paid someone an entire day's wage for one hour of work would not be in business long. But Jesus wasn't teaching about the earthly economy (we seem to know how it works, after all) but rather Jesus was teaching us about God's divine economy.

Before I get into that, I'd like to talk about parables and contrast. In order for us to see, our eyes need contrast (white/black, dark/light, texture/smooth). If we can't see contrast, we can't focus. If any of you have ever experienced "snow blindness" you'll know what I'm talking about. Parables are based on contrast. They are not literal stories. There was not, as far as anyone knows, and landowner who hired people at 5 p.m., paid them first (before the day-long laborers) and for the same daily wage. The point of it is contrast. Jesus is pointing out the character of God and in contrast the character of humanity. God's character is to pay someone, even if they only worked for an hour, the same wage. Period. That's who God is. The angels in heaven rejoice – not for the 99 who stayed with the flock but for the one who wandered off, was lost, and then was found and restored. For that one, there is great rejoicing in heaven. But, for the 99… there's probably a lot of grumbling going on. And why not, it's not fair, after all, to have a celebration for the one "sheep" who wandered off and completely ignore the steadfastness and dedication of the 99 who didn't wander off. Again, there's contrast – the way humans see fairness and the way that God rejoices.

Speaking of contrast, humans have a particular way of thinking – of remembering, to be specific – which is not how God remembers things. Humans have a tendency, when faced with fear or uncertainty, to remember how things were in the past and tell ourselves that things were better back then. It's an interesting phenomenon of our human thinking. Take for example our lesson today from the Book of Exodus. The Israelites have been free – out of captivity – for just two months. But then the fear of the day, or the uncertainty of where they are going to live and what they are going to eat, creeped up on them. Suddenly, they thought this: hey, when we were living in Egypt (in bondage) we had a pot of meat to eat at night. Things were better back then. They then started to blame Moses for dragging them out in the middle of nowhere. See how the mind works – they quickly forgot about being enslaved and burden of labor they suffered and instead remembered that they had a fire, and a pot, and some meat in it.

While I was on Sabbatical, I read a book, *Do Not Believe Everything You Think*. I then reread it yesterday. The author highlights this interesting way that the human mind thinks – in particular, that we don't recall the past in its entirety, we remember those things that were good and let go of the things that were bad when (and this is the key) we are facing fear and uncertainty. You see, the mind can travel back into our memories – where there is no uncertainty because you can't change the past – and then rationalizes that things were better back then (even when they were not).

While I was a chaplain at the V.A., I had a friend who did her chaplaincy work at a women's shelter near Oakland, CA. It's the type of shelter that they do not give anyone the address – she had to get in a van and be driven there – because each of the women, and sometimes their kids, were victims of domestic abuse. As a part of her training, and then later in her experience, when the women in the shelter started to get on their feet and started planning for their uncertain future, they often would rationalize getting back together again with their abusive partner because, "it wasn't so bad back then, I had a place to stay and I know (he) loved me." For the rest of us in our chaplaincy, we were shocked to hear this, but she repeated it enough to realize it's just a part of how our minds work.

God is not surprised by this. It's how we were made and wired. We don't like uncertainty. But, there is a way to get through uncertain times without longing for the past that, in reality, wasn't as good as we think it was.

One of my favorite parts of the wedding ceremony is said at the giving and receiving of rings. This phrase is repeated by each recipient: I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow and with all that I am and all that I have I honor you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. If you are wondering how to surrender all your uncertainties to God, I suggest you use those words, like this: *To you God, I surrender all my fears and anxieties and uncertainties of this day to you; with all that I am and with all that I have, I honor you, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

You can use that prayer when you are getting up the morning, or during the day (even while driving), and especially at night. Surrendering to God is what Jesus is calling us to do. Through his parables, Jesus shows us God's character (and our own) and that God is worthy for us to surrender to. After all, in the garden, before he was arrested, Jesus said: Not my will but yours. He Himself surrendered to God and He is calling us to do the same.

The character of God is shown in how the landowner will pay the same amount for those who show up for one hour of work at the field, or those for half a day, or those who worked for the entire day. As we practice surrender, as we practice giving over to God all of our worries and our uncertainties, we will find this peace and this rejoicing of the day like the worker who were called late in the day because none of us were called early in the morning to work in the field. None of us have worked all day in the field. We are the ones who had fear and anxiety at noon and we weren't called to work. It's like we are the workers at 3:00 and we're not called to work. We're the ones who find it's five o'clock and we're not called to work and we got fear and we have anxiety, but God **sees us**, no matter the time of day, and we surrender: All that I have and all that I am, I honor you. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.