

A few weeks ago Lee and Linda Bucher were on the road early one morning. They stopped at a Wawa. In the parking lot of this particular Wawa there was a small crowd of day laborers just waiting around, hoping that someone would hire them for the day. Somehow, they all knew that they might have a chance at working and getting paid that day if they showed up in the parking lot early that morning.

Was it a similar situation to when Jesus told his followers about the Kingdom of heaven being like a landowner who went out into the marketplace at all times of day to hire anyone he could find so they could have work that day and earn a living? Did some folks get to the Wawa parking lot too late to be hired, or did the employers come around again at nine, noon, three and five in order to hire anyone who hadn't been hired yet? Did they all get the same wage at the end of the day? It's hard to imagine. What employer in today's economy would pay an entire day's rate to those who only worked a few hours? Wouldn't he or she need to keep costs down and be careful of the bottom line?

From the perspective of the workers in Jesus' story—those who had gotten there early so as to get the job, and who worked all day, it's not fair. It's an injustice that those who just showed up at the end should get paid the same as they had. At an hourly rate, the first workers should get six times more than the last workers. But, they don't, and they grumble.

They grumble for at least three reasons, and each reason has to do with the workers' idea of justice.

1. They have compared themselves to the others, and have discovered that there is a big discrepancy between their hourly pay.
2. They had made the effort to be up and into the marketplace early. They were diligent in seeking work and better than the others who had arrived late. They were first in line because they deserved it, and they deserved it because they had made the necessary sacrifice to get there early.
3. They had worked harder than everyone else, and therefore deserved more.

I wonder if this same sense of justice pervades our own experience in the church? Do we expect privileged status because we give more time, or more energy, or more effort, or more work, or more money? OR, is something

different going on here? Might we belong to a different economy as the St. Matthew's brand Jesus followers?

If church is made up of God-seekers creating a space where people can come and be loved by Jesus Christ, where have we seen the love this past month? Where has love showed up? Where has love done justice? Where have we seen love in our midst? Was it measured according to merit or was it given freely? Does love diminish because there are fewer people in the pews today than a few years ago?

Some of you worry that we are in decline. Fewer and fewer Americans show up at worship or belong to organized religion these days. But, Jesus began with just twelve followers, and look what happened. The news of God's love spread all over the world from that little band of original followers.

Right here at St. Matthew's, there are at least 600 of us who consider ourselves members of St. Matthew's, even if we never all show up at the same time. That's down from over 1,000 ten years ago, and yet, it's a heck of a lot more than twelve.

You are probably thinking that it was different for the disciples because they were somehow more confident and effective than we are at telling others about Jesus' love. Let's not underestimate ourselves. Remember that Jesus called Matthew. Matthew was an outcast. He was a tax collector. No one liked him. No one trusted him. Everybody knew that the only way tax collectors got paid was from increasing the tax bill so they could keep some for themselves. So Matthew wasn't a model citizen, by any stretch. Yet Jesus called him and invited him to follow him anyway. We bear his name.

We don't become Christians because of our pedigree or social standing. We become Christians because we have decided to follow Jesus. We have said "yes" to our desire for God, and to God's desire for us. Today we are baptizing Wilhelmina Jane. She will become a full member of the body of Christ and a full member of St. Matthew's. It's certainly not because she is going to serve the church in some way, although she might. It's simply because we want her to receive God's grace in this sacrament of promises and belonging. How will what is done for her here today and every day hereafter shape her identity?

Time will tell. How has your baptism shaped your identity? What do you call yourself?

Christian?

Follower of Jesus?

Disciple?

Believer?

God's Beloved?

Seeker?

Episcopalian?

Servant?

Friend of Jesus?

Sinner?

Something else?

In this day and age, why do people come to church? Why do they seek God? There are probably as many answers to this question as there are members of the church. Even in a culture of religious decline, small groups of Christians pack a powerful witness. We have heard some of their amazing stories right here in this sanctuary.

People might come because they are hurt and need healing, and sometimes they are frustrated and need inspiration; and sometimes they feel grateful and need rejoicing; and sometimes they are overwhelmed, and need centering; and sometimes they have become unhinged and need reconnecting; and sometimes they don't know what they know—they just feel compelled to come. Whatever it is, something has stirred in their lives—something greater than themselves, and so, they come. And sometimes, along the way, they get disappointed because we are not perfect and we have not matched their expectations.

This is not a feel-good religion. Wilhelmina knows this already at her young age of seven months. It hasn't been easy. When Jesus said come and follow me, he told us it would be hard. He told us about the Cross and the struggle and the violence and the death. He never said it would feel good. Our own experience of being followers together bears this out. Of course there are moments of joy and peace along the way. But it's a different economy. It's an economy where our merit, prestige, worth, reputation, or standing neither helps us nor hurts

us because we belong to God's economy of inexhaustible love. As a parish, we are in the business of connecting with God's love and connecting with others who need it just as much as we do. We are in the business of grace-bearing, and good businesses **know** what their business is! How are we doing with our core product? What are the consumers saying? How are our marketing and sales doing? Have you polished your pitch lately? What is your 30 second elevator speech? And most importantly, where will we find new customers?

They'll be out waiting to be called for a day's work.