

THAT'S NOT FAIR!

As many of you know, I used to work in the business world before I entered the ministry.

Human Resources was my bailiwick and part of my responsibility was to make sure that the employees of our company were paid fairly.

“Fair” meant that what our employees were paid would be competitive with what employees of other companies in the area were being paid for doing similar kinds of work.

The fundamental principle was: equal pay for equal work.

It was good business to pay our employees fairly because when a company fails to do so, the more productive employees leave and the less productive employees stay.

So providing competitive pay and benefits is a must for an employer if they want to attract and retain good employees.

In light of this, the situation described in today's Gospel lesson would be a nightmare for any employer.

Any company that paid some of its employees as much for two hours work as it paid others for eight hours work would be begging for a walkout or a strike.

It just wouldn't be fair.

So why does Jesus seem to endorse such unfair treatment?

What point is he trying to make?

Well, first of all, let's consider what the word "fair" actually means.

The dictionary defines "fair" as "showing no evidence of favoritism" and it lists the following synonyms: *just, equitable, impartial, unprejudiced, unbiased, straightforward, objective.*

Well, if that's what "fair" means, I'm not sure that any of us can claim to be fair.

Are we always impartial, un-biased, impartial and just in how we treat other people?

I'll leave the answer to your own conscience, but I know what mine tells me.

It seems to me that "fairness" is an ideal which few human beings ever achieve.

There is only One who is completely fair and that is God.

As our confirmation students read in their Catechism, As well as being all-knowing and all-powerful, “God is just, that is, fair and impartial.”

Deuteronomy 32:4: “He is the Rock. His works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.”

Our heavenly Father treats us equally because He loves us equally.

But before we start celebrating that fact, let’s consider what it implies.

If God loves each of us equally, then he loves a serial killer as much as He loves me.

If God is angry over sin, then he is just as angry over my sins as he is over the sins of a man who beats his children.

It means that he sent his Son to die for serial killers and child-beaters as well as for me.

And since He has commanded me to love and forgive others as He has loved and forgiven me, then I must pray for serial killers and child beaters to be saved as

well and look forward to spending eternity with him in heaven.

Kind of puts it in a different light, doesn't it?

Yet that's how things work in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus tells us to do things which run completely counter to our human instincts.

To pray for our enemies and do good to those who harm us.

That doesn't seem fair!

To offer the left side of our face to someone who slugs us on the right side of our face doesn't seem fair either!

That doesn't seem fair either!

Yet the Bible tells us that God is absolutely and perfectly fair.

So how can this be?

To answer that question, we have to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden and consider what actually happened there.

You see, when Adam and Eve opened up the spigot and let sin pour in, creation underwent a seismic shift, a massive sea-change.

All creation, which existed in a state of perfect order and harmony, began to deteriorate—to unravel.

It was afflicted with earthquakes, floods, fires and droughts.

We who God had appointed to be his image-bearers were also changed.

Our desire to love each other was replaced by a desire to compete with each other.

Our desire for peace was replaced by a lust for war and conquest.

Our desire to serve each other was replaced by the desire to be masters over each other.

In short: love was replaced by selfishness.

And in the wake of all this we became confused.

Before the fall, we had perfect minds, flawless intellects; we walked with God and could understand all spiritual truth.

But when sin entered the world, our minds became clouded and and we could no longer see clearly.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Now we see as through a glass darkly.”

Yet we continued to think that we were seeing things clearly.

Part of our foolishness was to imagine that we weren't fools.

And so when things don't make sense to us, we assume that the problem lies the things themselves rather than in our own limited ability to understand them.

We're like the three blind men who tried to figure out what they were touching when they felt the elephant.

The first one grabbed the trunk and said, “It's a snake.”

The second one felt the side and said, “It's a wall.”

The third threw his arms around one of its legs and said, “It's a tree.”

They couldn't grasp the whole picture because they couldn't see it; their powers of discernment were seriously limited.

All three of them had it wrong, yet each one of them was positive that he had it right.

This is called “intellectual pride.”

It was the original sin of Adam and Eve, who wanted to know what God knew, and it is the continuing sin of men who imagine that they can know what God knows.

And pride always goes before the fall.

So what does this have to do with fair and unfair?

Simply this: God has given us spiritual truth in His Word.

If we want to know what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, we have only to go to God’s Word and He will tell us.

And if what we find there seems strange and unfamiliar we will do well to blame it on our lack of comprehension rather than doubt the truth of God’s Word.

God’s Word *is* the truth and it is the means through which the Holy Spirit helps us grow in grace and in understanding.

As Jesus prayed to the Father: “Sanctify them by the truth: thy Word is truth.”

This seems simple enough, but in our pride we set ourselves up as *judges* of God’s Word instead of being its grateful recipients.

We imagine that since we’ve learned a few things over the ages, we know more now than Paul or Moses did.

Maybe even than Christ Himself.

So we play games with His Word—we re-arrange it, we throw out parts of it, we change parts of it to make it more palatable to OUR sensitivities and to force-fit it into the *philosophie du jour*, the spirit of our age.

We do whatever is necessary to eliminate any conflict between God’s wisdom and our wisdom, and we do it by reducing His thoughts to our thoughts.

“Surely,” we say, God wouldn’t have killed and driven out all those people living in Canaan so that He could give their land to His children, the Israelites.

THAT WOULDN’T HAVE BEEN FAIR TO THE CANAANITES.

Surely Jesus wouldn't have sent demons into all those pigs so that they could drive them into the water to drown!

THAT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN FAIR TO THE PIGS—OR TO THE PEOPLE WHO OWNED THEM.

And so we come full circle. Why do God's ways seem unfair to us?

Well, if we want to insist that God should have been fair to the Canaanites, the pigs and the homosexuals, then to be consistent, we would have to insist that he be fair with us as well.

And if God were to be fair with us He would simply kill us all and send us to hell.

You see, another attribute of God is that he is completely truthful and cannot lie, and since He said that the wages of sin is death, and since we are all sinners, in order to keep His word, God would have to kill us all.

That would be the *fair* thing to do.

It would not, however, be the *loving* thing to do, and God IS love.

So God sent His own Son to take all our sins onto Himself so that he could punish Him for our sins and let us go scot-free.

He treated His Son unfairly out of love for you and me.

So do we want fairness from God, or do we want love?

In the parable, the laborers who worked the entire shift got exactly what they were promised in the way of wages, but they grumbled over the landowner's generosity to the workers who showed up late in the day.

And are we any different?

When we work all day, we prefer for the master to be fair. But when we show up late in the game, we prefer for the master to be generous.

When we're on top of things, we want fairness.

When we're in desperate straights, we want mercy.

And what the landowner said to the daylong workers, God says to us all: "Are you envious because I am generous?"

If serial killer repents of all his sins at the end of his life, accepts Christ as his Savior and goes to heaven—is that a cause for rejoicing?

Would you say, “Thanks be to God!”

Or would you say, “THAT’S NOT FAIR!”

It’s worth thinking about.

Amen.