

# God's Sheep

## The Parable of the Vineyard Owner

*Mathew 20:1-16*

**Info for Leader:** Last week in CapKids, we explored the Parable of the Vineyard Owner, and I wanted to continue the conversation in our small churches this week.

This is an excerpt from *God's Stories as Told by God's Children*, which we shared this past Sunday with the kids:

“Rules, rules, rules. Rules are everywhere. Some rules are good because they keep us safe. What are some good rules that keep us safe? ‘Don’t talk to strangers,’ or ‘Don’t touch a hot stove.’ But sometimes rules can be used as an excuse not to do what is just, especially when we’re talking about things that are hard to understand, like what justice is, what God is like, or how we should treat others.

If all we do is follow rules—this is called legalism—we might miss why the rules exist in the first place. So Jesus, who was a brilliant teacher, taught the reasons behind rules through parables. A parable is a made-up story that helps people better understand a difficult truth about how to live. These stories were designed to teach what justice is, who God is, and how we are to treat one another.

When Jesus told the story of the vineyard owner, he showed his listeners that the rule to pay workers their wages is about more than simply time equals money—it is about ensuring that everyone has enough to live. The story reminds us that employers have a responsibility toward the well-being of their workers.

God’s kin-dom is not like the kingdoms that ruled the lands where Jesus and his friends lived. Unlike the empires of that time, Jesus spoke about a society where everyone is treated justly. The moral of this story was true then, and it remains true today.”

We then focused on the difference between *fairness* and *justice*. In God’s economy, justice means ensuring that everyone has enough to live and flourish. Sometimes, what is just may not always appear fair when viewed through the lens of equal distribution or reward.

This Sunday, I would like to continue the conversation by exploring how this parable might speak to people whose circumstances make participation in traditional forms of work more difficult. Imagine hearing this story as a person living with a disability, as an elderly person, or as a child. What might this parable reveal about God's concern for those whose needs remain the same, even when their ability to earn an income or contribute in socially recognized ways is limited?

This also provides an opportunity to reflect on disability and the image of God. As Christians, we believe that every person bears God's image and possesses inherent dignity and worth. Rather than seeing disability as something that diminishes a person's value, we can ask how people with different abilities reveal God's character, enrich our communities, and teach us new ways of understanding dependence, belonging, resilience, and love.

How do we, as followers of Jesus teachings, learn to notice those who may sometimes be overlooked? How might we recognize and celebrate the many ways people embody Christ in our world?

I am not an expert in this area, but I believe these are important conversations for us to explore together. To support our discussion, I have put together a list of children's books that feature characters living with disabilities, as well as a book recommendation for parents who would like to learn more.

### **MIXER:**

#### **Option #1 "Belonging Web"**

Use yarn in a circle.

Each child says one thing that helps people feel included, then tosses the yarn.

A web forms.

This helps us recognize belonging is something we build together.

### **Discussion and Reading**

**Intro for All Ages: (Summary of above):** *You could read the Parable again - Matthew 20: 1-16*

This Sunday, we're going to keep talking about the story of the vineyard owner. We'll think about what this story might mean for people who cannot work in the same ways as others, such as some people with disabilities, older adults, or children.

## **What do you think this story tells us about God?**

### **Does God care only about people who can work the most, or does God care about everyone?**

In this story, Jesus shows us that God wants everyone to have what they need.

We'll also talk about how every person is made in God's image. That means every person is important, loved, and valuable. People have different gifts, strengths, and abilities, and those differences help make our communities special and stronger. We can learn a lot from one another about friendship, courage, kindness, and love.

### **READ:**

#### **Option #1: Like Me by Laura Wifler**

Written from the perspective of a sibling whose brother is living with a disability. This book takes the reader through a day in their life allowing further understanding of similarities and differences that are experienced by those with disabilities.

#### **Option #2: A Church for All by Gayle E. Pitman**

This is a great option to explore diversity in our church community and the diversity of God's creation. This book also fits well into our pride month conversations.

### **WONDER QUESTIONS**

1. After reading the story, what is one thing that stood out to you?
2. As followers of Jesus, how can we notice people who are sometimes left out or overlooked?
3. How can we welcome them, learn from them, and celebrate the special gifts they bring to our communities?

### **ACTIVITY**

#### **Fair or Just? Corners Game**

Label four corners of the room:

- Fair
- Just
- Both
- Not Sure

Read scenarios and have children and adults move to the corner that best matches their answer.

Examples:

- Everyone gets one cookie, even though some people missed snack time.
- Everyone gets a winter coat, but some children receive larger coats because theirs no longer fit.
- Everyone receives the same amount of water after running a race.
- A student who broke their arm gets extra time to finish a project.
- Everyone gets a turn on the swing for exactly 2 minutes.
- A younger child gets extra help climbing the playground structure.
- Everyone receives the same size backpack for school.
- Students can choose between drawing, writing, or acting out their book report.
- Everyone gets the same-sized lunch.
- A child with allergies receives a different lunch that is safe for them to eat.
- A player who is new to the game receives extra coaching and encouragement.
- Everyone must throw the ball from the same distance.
- Players can choose a distance that matches their ability.
- Everyone is expected to help carry chairs after church.
- Some people help carry chairs while others help by greeting, organizing, or cleaning because they have different abilities.
- Everyone gets the same Bible.
- A child with low vision receives a large-print Bible.
- Everyone gets to share one idea during a discussion.
- Every student receives a trophy.
- The winning team receives a trophy.
- Everyone gets the same Christmas gift.
- Everyone receives the same allowance.

Discussion questions:

- Why did you choose that corner?
- Is treating everyone the same always fair?
- What helps people thrive?

## CRAFT

### Image of God Mirrors



Materials:

- Paper plates or cardstock circles
- Foil or reflective paper
- Markers, stickers, jewels.

Around the edge, children write ways they or others can reflect God's image, including those who may experience disabilities.

Examples:

- Kind
- Creative
- Helpful
- Loving
- Brave

Discuss how God's image is reflected in many different people and many different abilities.

Avoid focusing on appearance and instead focus on character traits.

Further discussion could be: how would someone who isn't verbal show love or bravery? How would someone who is in a wheelchair express creativity or be helpful?