

Women's' World Day of Prayer 2017

St Matthew- St Aidan, Buckhorn

The Rev'd Glenn Empey, Matthew 20:1-16

Am I being unfair to you?

A very open and honest and caring question. And I assume it would be asked genuinely. It's a question with different implications depending on where in the world a person asks this question of another. Unfairness in one part of the world may have vastly different implications in another part of the world.

In the global north, such as in Canada, in comparison to other places in the world, being unfair could vary from an annoyance to more serious results but in other parts of the world unfairness could easily result in starvation, disease, instigate civil war, and even bring death. While the general situation across our homeland is less extreme than many places elsewhere, sadly there are exceptions in our land, most infamously, the murdered and missing women, mostly women of our First Nations.

And again sadly, that evokes the Canadian legacy of its treatment of all people of our First Nations. I am deeply ashamed, at a deeply personal level, of how our churches succumbed to the policy of the Government of Canada in our treatment of our First Nations Peoples. So, our nation, in the relative bounty of the Global North, has not been – and is not – inculpable in how we mete out fairness.

Am I being unfair to you?

“Am I being unfair to you” is a question that needs to be asked even where it has not been asked before. It's a question that needs to be asked everywhere. It's a question that says the person asking it has had a change of heart. Without asking the question the person would remain desensitized to the impact of their unfairness. Asking the question admits scales may be tilted.

Some people have been asking those kinds of questions for centuries. Take the Abolitionists as an example from the late 1800's and before. Some go on asking the same questions today. Maybe not enough are asking those kinds of questions and grappling with the responses.

There is still time to head to the vineyard to join in the work of the Master.

There is a myriad of forums in which the question can be asked. The setting of the forums extends from extreme situations that affect physical survival and the basic quality of life to ones where prejudice divides people into categories where some are favoured over others.

Some people have been working in the vineyard for years but there is still time to go to do the work of the Master.

The question is valid in both extreme settings and in ones where injustice is more latent, hidden. In those less severe cases, there may even be more opportunity for dialogue to seek a deeper level of mutual understanding. The stakes are less pronounced but the outcome is still of great value... and with more potential since, at least, some advances have already been established through the basics of legislated human rights. That corner in Canada's part of the vineyard needs tilling if you've been listening to the news.

In other settings, the recognition of basic human rights may still be the first step in dealing with the question.

Whether the vineyard has been in operation for years, centuries, or just newly opened, there is time to respond to the Master's call to join in the work.

There is still time to go to the vineyard.

It is immensely difficult for a child soldier in the DRC to even grasp what the question means. To start with, someone else should be asking the question of him. And that person too would be oblivious to the meaning of the question, the person who enslaved the child soldier into killing. Pollyanna idealism does not last long in the vineyard of the Master.

The first work of the vineyard is to plant seeds so that the meaning and significance of the question can emerge so the depth of its meaning can be recognized and understood.

Going to the vineyard to work can lead to a change of heart and there is still work to be done in the vineyard of the Master.

Am I being unfair to you is a profound question. The person who genuinely asks that question has learned enough to know about injustice, imbalances, and the inequities of oppression ... and their impact, and the part he or she she plays in that unfairness whether intentional or not.

The person with the power has to learn to ask the question. To ask the question means being already able to recognize injustice. Instead of clouding things in colonial superiority of one culture over another... instead it comes out in the open as a conversation on level ground between people who both recognize they are creatures in the same human race. People who are standing on holy ground of shared being, in the same family... and know it. Many would say as children of God.

There is indeed still time to join in the work of the Master in the vineyard.

The work has been going on for years and years. Labourers have been at work since the early dawn. There is still time.

There is still time to become able to see the simple yet profound wording of the question. And note, the question is not “Are you being unfair to me?” as some kind of rhetorical question. The question is “Am I being unfair to you?”

It is so amazing how well the Women of the Philippines crafted their question. It requires of the person who poses the question already to have understood how they may be part of the unfairness. A massive step in learning for many to take. And even where there would be some platform of understanding beforehand through basic human rights, it still reinforces a recognition of the more subtle inequities that bring unfairness even in lesser extremes.

The question also is not “*Was* I unfair to you?” although the effect of the past is often inherent in the present moments. The question is about *now*.

It doesn't matter when you go out to the vineyard. Some have been there since the first light of day. Some will join at noon and even some will join toward the end of the workday. It does not matter when you go to the vineyard of the Master.

There is still much work to be done in the vineyard of the Master and, just as the parable teaches, it doesn't matter what time of day or in what month or year you first go into the vineyard of the Master.

What matters is that you go.