

Workers in the Field
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The Parable of the “Workers in the Field” and the hard saying “Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword.”

I have often thought that there is a parable for everyone. There is parable for each one of us that we do not like and wish that Jesus had not spoken those words.

The Parable of the Workers is such a parable for a person who has always aligned themselves with the unions and worker’s rights. A religious education teacher has only to tell this story to children and their response is invariably, “It’s not fair. If I worked all day, why should he get paid the same as me.” The short answer given was, “Because the boss said so and he could do what he wanted to do with his money.” This is as much a hard teaching as Jesus saying, “I have come to bring not peace but a sword”.

This parable and these words resonate clearly in our society in which working people and their employers are struggling with the arguments for and against socialism. It is a sword that does not bring peace.

I have tried to come to grips with these teachings. I can work around children who say, “But it is not fair.” I will give them a scenario such as a man who had to stay home and care for his sick mother and could not get to work in time. Children can relate to personal problems, but this answer only touches on the deeper and complex nature of those who work in the field and for the owner of the field. Can a worker expect consistent wages for work given and not be subject to an owner who arbitrarily decides to arbitrarily change wages on his or her own whims? Does a person who has built up a business use his or her money as they see fit?

I have not been able to fully resolve these hard sayings in my own mind. This parable can be used by both sides of the political arguments of today.

The problems that are hard to resolve in the arguments revolve around the question of who actually owns the field – the workers, the owners, the state or God.