

A NOTE TO PARENTS

It is part of our human nature to feel that we deserve the good things that come to us. And when something bad happens, we feel we must deserve that also—because of some a mistake we have made, or as a punishment for something wrong we have done. It's hard to accept the idea that bad things may happen to good people. We may find it less threatening to ourselves to learn that the cause of some tragedy was something we are sure we would never do: if the driver who was killed had been drinking ... or the children burned in the fire were left alone in the house and had played with matches. Now we can think, "That would never happen to me." But it's equally hard to accept the idea that good things may happen to bad people. It bothers us deeply that people should get something they "don't deserve." It threatens our whole view of the world.

Children share this habit of mind, and much of our interaction with them as parents powerfully reinforces it. "You've been so good—I'll buy you an ice cream cone," we may say. Or, "If you'd been careful the way I told you to, that would never have happened." We worry that picking up a crying baby will spoil him. We seek to reward good behavior, and to discourage obnoxious behavior by trying to make sure it has unpleasant consequences.

But Jesus overturns most of our ideas about reward and punishment. He suggests that God has little interest in motivating good behavior with rewards and discouraging laziness or viciousness by appropriate punishment. "The last shall be first," he says, "and the first last. What does it take away from *you* if I am nicer to these others than they deserve? I have still kept my promise to you." We might give our children a better idea of God's love if we sometimes said to them, "I hope you will be good, because I love you and I want you to love what is good. But I will buy you an ice cream cone whether you are good or not." God's love for us is not limited by our ability to deserve it. It is always there.

(Have a "denarius" ready when your child shows you how many baskets he or she has filled, on the reverse of this page!)

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Year A
PROPER 20
TRACKS 1 and 2



JESUS TOLD THIS STORY:

Early one morning, a man hired some workers to help in his vineyard.

A black and white line drawing of a man in a long robe standing in a vineyard. He is talking to a group of people, some of whom are carrying baskets of grapes. There are several large buckets on the ground.

He agreed to pay them each ONE DENARIUS. All day, they worked hard.

A black and white line drawing showing several workers in a vineyard. They are carrying baskets full of grapes. One worker is standing next to a large bucket filled with grapes.

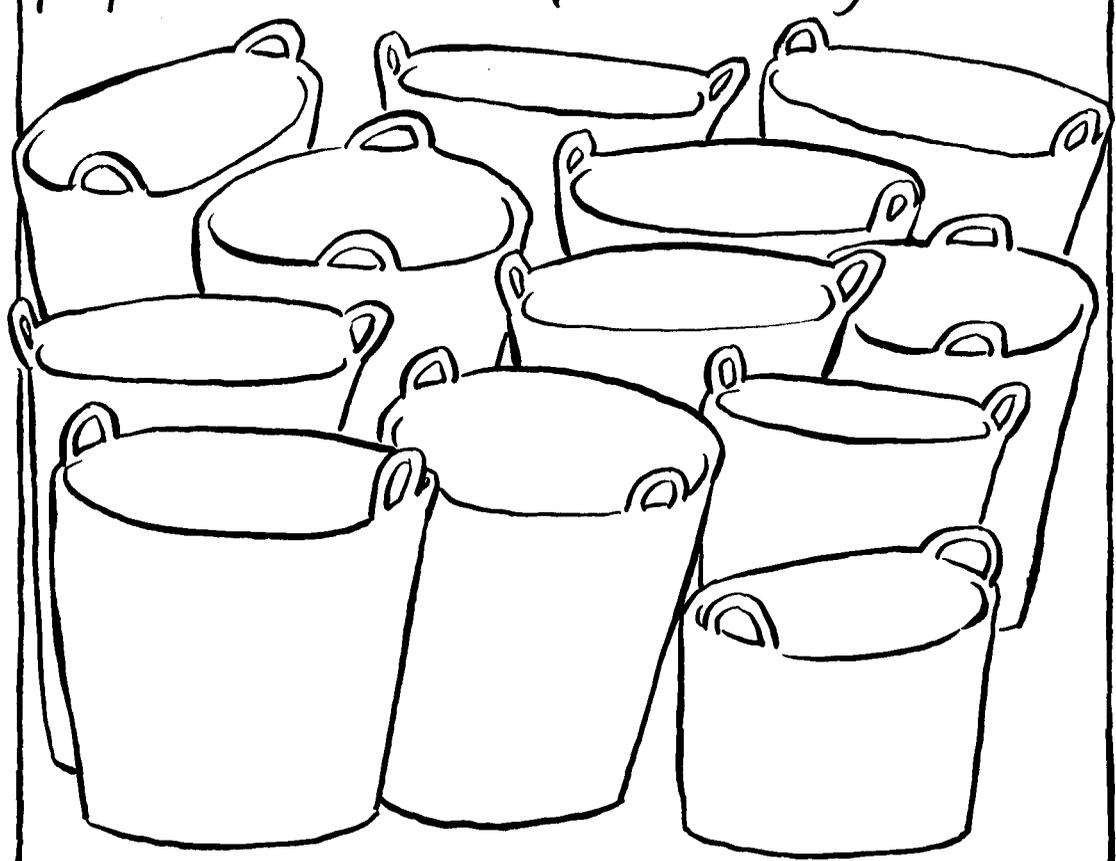
As the day went on, the owner hired more and more workers.

A black and white line drawing of the owner hiring more workers. He is talking to a group of people, some of whom are carrying baskets of grapes. There are several large buckets on the ground.

At the end of the day, he paid them all the same: ONE DENARIUS!

A black and white line drawing of the owner paying the workers. He is handing a coin to one of the workers, who is holding a basket of grapes. Other workers are standing nearby, some looking surprised.

The owner paid ONE DENARIUS to the workers who worked all day, just as he promised. Then he surprised everyone by paying just as much to the people who worked only a little while. Some people said that wasn't fair. What do you think?

A black and white line drawing of a large number of empty baskets, arranged in several rows. Each basket has a handle and is open at the top.

Color as many baskets as you can, and fill them with grapes. Remember, the owner will pay you a whole denarius, no matter how many baskets you fill!