

Yes, I know we have already read one story,
but I'd like to tell you one other...
perhaps you will remember it from your childhood:

Once upon a time, there was a little red hen who lived on a farm.
She was friends with a lazy dog, a sleepy cat, and a noisy yellow duck .
One day the little red hen found some seeds on the ground.
and she had an idea. She would plant the seeds .

The little red hen asked her friends, "Who will help me plant the seeds ?"

"Not I," barked the lazy dog .

"Not I," purred the sleepy cat .

"Not I," quacked the noisy yellow duck .

"Then I will," said the little red hen.

So the little red hen planted the seeds all by herself.

When the seeds had grown, the little red hen asked her friends,

"Who will help me cut the wheat ?"

"Not I," barked the lazy dog .

"Not I," purred the sleepy cat .

"Not I," quacked the noisy yellow duck .

"Then I will," said the little red hen.

So the little red hen cut the wheat all by herself.

When all the wheat was cut, the little red hen asked her friends, "Who will help me take
the wheat to the mill to be ground into flour ?"

"Not I," barked the lazy dog.

"Not I," purred the sleepy cat .

"Not I," quacked the noisy yellow duck .

"Then I will," said the little red hen.

**So the little red hen brought the wheat to the mill all by herself,
ground the wheat into flour, and carried the heavy sack of flour back to the farm .**

The tired little red hen asked her friends, "Who will help me bake the bread ?"

"Not I," barked the lazy dog .

"Not I," purred the sleepy cat .

"Not I," quacked the noisy yellow duck .

Then I will," said the little red hen . So the little red hen baked the bread all by herself.

When the bread was finished, the tired little red hen asked her friends,

"Who will help me eat the bread ?"

"I will," barked the lazy dog .

"I will," purred the sleepy cat .

"

I will," quacked the noisy yellow duck .

"No!" said the little red hen . "I will."

And the little red hen ate the bread:

all -by -her-self.

**Truth be told...I would be willing to guess that most of us would agree more
with the little red hen, than this parable of Jesus...**

**It seems only right, only fair, most of us would say,
that if you work harder and longer...
your compensation is greater.**

**That view is part of our American dream:
work hard and long and you will get rich.**

**But we don't read the parables of Jesus to support our cultural views...
We read them so that our hearts and our minds might have a chance
to be molded, folded, into Divine Wisdom.**

**So what might be the Wisdom being offered today?
First of all...I'd like you to put aside for a moment,
all the other explanations that you have heard about this parable: things like:
God mercy or God's magnificent generosity.
Of course God is merciful and generous. That's nothing new, really!**

**Although some people, maybe most people,
shrink God's mercy and generosity into their idea of justice and fairness....
But there's more to this parable than that.**

**Scripture scholar, Amy Jill-Levine offers a different understanding of this parable.
One based on the culture and economics of Jesus day and his teachings.
She says, and I quote:
"Jesus is neither a Marxist nor a capitalist.
Rather, he is both an idealist and a pragmatist.
His focus is often less directly on "good news to the poor"
than on "responsibility of the rich."**

For Levine, that's the crux of the parable.

**Prof. Levine suggests that the proper
focus of this parable isn't the landowner,
but on those who were hired first.
When the men were hired in the morning,
they agreed on the usual daily wage for their labor.
The usual daily wage was one denarius,
and it enough to buy food for your family, for one day.
Work one day, eat one day. Seems fair....**

**The problem Jesus saw was the resentment of those hired in the morning.
They got upset because they worked long hours in the hot sun and got paid
the same as those who only hired in the late afternoon...
it does seem somewhat unfair, I must admit....**

**Unemployment was rampant in Jesus' time.
Poverty was severe.**

**Levine believes that Jesus was teaching his hearers to be
grateful that they had work and food for the day...
to be grateful that their families could eat that night...and, and....
to be happy for their neighbors
because children could eat supper that night as well....**

**The landowner was generous, no doubt.
Even the ancient Jews believed Yahweh did not always follow
human notions of justice and generosity...
and maybe, perhaps, we can accept God's generosity
especially when we put it off to the next world in the next life...**

ok, they can get enter heaven too, even though they did a bunch of rotten things early in life,

But this a parable isn't about God's generosity in the next life...

but about OUR generosity in THIS life...

when we are dealing with the essentials of life...

When we are talking about food and shelter,

about respect and kindness...

I'm not talking about iPhones and fancy cars..

The message of Jesus is real and practical in this life,

for this life as we live it NOW.

Jesus really wasn't too worried about what God will do in the next life,

He was/is very much concerned about what we do in our lives...

He wants us to grow our hearts large...

to celebrate when others have enough

to be content when we have enough...

to know that there is enough for all

and to understand that this is the vision of the Reign of God.

But knowing what is enough...is really, really hard!

***What* in the world is 'enough'?**

Our whole economy is built on the idea that we never have enough....

THIS is a huge problem in Jesus' view.

We all know that there is a large income gap in our country today

and in many countries around the world.

This large gap, many say, is responsible for much of the violence of the world.

Sure, we can say: those of us who work hard and are compensated well have earned it!

And that is true, to a point.

But when the compensation far exceeds the work done...

when some are hungry and homeless while others throw excess food in the garbage....

well...that's a problem for Jesus...

Those who have 'enough', Jesus says,

have a spiritual and moral obligation to make sure that everyone,

no matter how long or how hard they have worked, or not....

that those of us who have enough have an obligation, Jesus says, to see that

everyone has enough to eat,

everyone has a home to live,

that all the children have enough to eat.

Now, perhaps you struggle with this teaching of his...

It's a hard one for a lot of us...

but the question for all of us is:

am I follower of Jesus

or the little red hen?

amen.