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It's hard to believe that here we are, at Labor Day weekend, which for many is the symbolic end of summer. In our minds, summer begins with another holiday, Memorial Day. Often people say we forget the reason for Memorial Day, that we turn it into another three-day weekend. But I maintain that Americans are much more familiar with Memorial Day, and comfortable with its bittersweet commemoration of the incredible sacrifice of those who died for our country, than Labor Day, with its connotations of unions, politics, and socialist celebrations.

Why are we hesitant to honor labor, and all of us who have been laborers of one form or another for most of our lives? Certainly Jesus did not show any such hesitation. Jesus' father Joseph supported his family through his work as a carpenter and he trained his son to follow in his trade. When Jesus began his public ministry, he did not first take his message to royalty, rulers, wealthy landowners and merchants, religious elite, or the intelligentsia. Instead, Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and called out to humble fishermen, Peter and Andrew, who were casting their nets with the hope of catching fish to feed their families. From the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and these first disciples went from village to village, teaching the people in images they lived and understood, those of the labor of shepherds, farmers, masons, and weavers. Jesus called for many more laborers to join in his abundant harvest.

In one of Jesus' most intriguing parables, he describes to us the vineyard owner who goes out at dawn to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. Several more times during the day, the owner returns and hires workers he finds waiting there for the chance to have work that day. The vineyard owner hires them all and sends them back to his vineyard until sunset, when he gathers them to give the workers their wages. He starts with the workers to arrive last, giving them a full day's pay, and makes his way through all the workers, paying them the same amount, including those who started working shortly after dawn. In discussions about this parable, the focus usually is on the fairness of the equal wages paid to the first and the last. But I see this passage as one of Jesus' great messages to us on justice—that all laborers need work, must be treated with dignity, deserve to be paid fair wages, and are viewed equally by their Lord.

The challenge for us is to bring that message forward to our day, as we work together to be laborers for the plentiful harvest we can all share in, and to honor all those who labor on behalf of our community. Please enjoy your holiday, Labor Day.