

THE NUMBERS GAME

21 - the movie - based on the book 'Bringing Down the House' by Ben Mezrich

Ben Campbell is a young, highly intelligent, student at M.I.T. in Boston who strives to succeed. Wanting a scholarship to transfer to Harvard School of Medicine with the desire to become a doctor, Ben learns that he cannot afford the \$300,000 for the four to five years of schooling as he comes from a poor, working-class background. But one evening, Ben is introduced by his unorthodox math professor Micky Rosa into a small but secretive club of five. Students Jill, Choi, Kianna, and Fisher, who are being trained by Professor Rosa of the skill of card counting at blackjack. Intrigued by the desire to make money, Ben joins his new friends on secret weekend trips to Las Vegas where, using their skills of code talk and hand signals, they have Ben make hundreds of thousands of dollars in winning blackjack at casino after casino. Ben only wants to make enough money for the tuition to Harvard and then back out...

Easier said than done (Neil Sadaka)

Numbers figure, in an ancient parable (a shocking story) told by Jesus

‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After **agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage**, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and **I will pay you whatever is right.**” So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because **no one has hired us.**” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.”

- in the Numbers, rate of pay and hours worked
- no detail around the intensity or situation of the task

- no mention of skill level or experience
- these are the poorest of the local poor
- a stress on unemployment

When evening came, the **owner of the vineyard** said to **his manager**, “Call the labourers and **give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.**” When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they **thought they would receive more**; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, **they grumbled** against the landowner, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”

- a distinction in roles between landowner and manager
- a peculiar detail on order, last/first, also later in text
- physical/emotional response, grumbling (against landowner)
- an understandable logic (to us)

But he replied to one of them, “Friend, **I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me** for the usual daily wage? Take **what belongs to you** and go; **I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.** Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or **are you envious because I am generous?**” So **the last will be first, and the first will be last.**’

- landowner (God) responds
- Like Tevye (We had an agreement)
- You have what belongs to you (possession undefined)
- I have made a choice to employ all, regardless of any circumstance
- Crux of the whole matter: envious of generosity

BILL LOADER

for Matthew the parable is less a defence of Jesus' practice of inclusion of outcasts and society's least, and more a warning to people in his community who imagine they are deserving of special honour because they have been in the community in leadership for a long time.

In a sense John the Baptist was making the same point when he challenged the Pharisees and Sadducees that they should not lay too much weight on being sons of Abraham; it is **performance and quality of obedience which counts**.

Try applying it to yourself.. In our very verbal faith, words easily become a substitute for reality. And there is an **odd sense of satisfaction we can gain by seriously talking about issues such as poverty without ever doing anything about it**.

PAUL GIBSON

. . . this parable is perennial because it raises again and again questions about value. Do we, as individuals, as a church, as a nation, as a culture, **value ourselves for the gifts we have been given**, for the strengths we find within ourselves, for our capacity to love, to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice? Or do we locate our value system **in the difference between ourselves and others, grumbling if the balance does not favour us, blaming a universe in which the good fortune of others might outweigh our own?**

These are serious questions, certainly for our private peace of mind and for the health and morality of our communities. But they also affect the **relationships of nations, the harmony of races, the hunger of whole continents, the prospects of world peace**.

STEPHEN LEWIS, Jack Layton, on generosity

(Jack Layton's) . . . remarkable letter . . . was a testament written in the very throes of death that set out what Jack wanted for his caucus, for his party, for young people, for all Canadians. Inevitably, we fastened on those last memorable lines about hope, optimism and love. But the letter was, at its heart, a manifesto for social democracy. And if there was one word that might sum up Jack Layton's unabashed social democratic message, it would be **generosity**. He wanted, in the simplest and most visceral terms, a more generous Canada . . . He talks of social justice, health care, pensions, **no one left behind**, seniors, children, climate change, equality and again that defining phrase, "a more inclusive and generous Canada."