

Story 7. Apricot Jam



“I have so much fruit this year, I don’t know what I’m going to do,” said Dog as she gazed at the apricot trees in her beautiful garden.

Dog loved apricots, and she had many apricot trees, all in a row like lamp posts. This year had been a very good year for apricots. There had been soaking rains and lots of bright sunshine. Dog had mulched the ground, pulled out the weeds and kept the trees pruned. The branches were laden with fruit.

“I have never seen my apricots looking so good,” said Dog. “I’ll pick them all tomorrow and make lots of apricot jam. I’ll keep some and I’ll give some to my friends,” she said as she munched on a juicy apricot.

That night Dog started to think how she would make the apricot jam. She would have to pick them, wash the fruit, cut them in half and remove the stones, put them in her biggest pot, add sugar and boil them. Then she would have to let the jam cool before putting it in jars and sealing the lids. Then, the worst part of all – yuk, cleaning up the mess.

Dog could not sleep. She was still thinking of all the hard work she had to do. As the grandpuppy clock chimed out midnight, she sat up in bed and said in an alarmed voice, “I’ll never get it done in time. There are far too many apricots for me to do it on my own. I’ll have to get help.” After thinking for a few minutes she said, “I know. I will ask my friends. I will pay them five dollars, and give them each a jar of jam.”

Then she fell asleep. She was sure that her good friends would help her.

Next morning, she was out of bed early and ran around to Cupine’s home.

“Can you help me pick my apricots – and make jam? I will pay you five dollars,” asked Dog.

"No problem. I'm always happy to help a friend." said Cupine as he put on his sunhat and headed off to Dog's garden.

By eight o'clock Cupine was hard at work picking fruit in the morning sun. It was very hard work because he was so small. He had to stretch to reach even the lowest branch.

Next Dog went to Crocosmile's house. She was busy cleaning her motorbike.

"Can you help me pick my apricots – and make jam? I will pay you five dollars," asked Dog.

"Yes I'll help, but first I have to finish cleaning my motorbike. I'll come at ten o'clock," replied Crocosmile.

At Geelaugh's house Dog asked, "Can you help me pick my apricots – and make jam? I will pay you five dollars."

"I'm selling my dirty lime green car today – getting a new orange one," said Geelaugh. "I can't come until twelve o'clock, but then I will come."

Dog ran over to Happypotamus' farm. "Can you help me pick my apricots – and make jam? I will pay you five dollars."

"Happy to help," said Happypotamus. "But I have some cakes in the oven. I'll have to wait until they're baked. I'll be there at two o'clock."

When Dog asked Wombrat he replied, "I'll come. I should be able to get there about four o'clock. First I want to have a rest. You can pay me five dollars and give me a box of chocolates."

"Ok", replied Dog.

Wombrat didn't really want to have a rest. He wanted to tidy his secret food cupboards and to work out where he would store the chocolate he would buy with the five dollars that Dog promised him.

Dog hurried back to her garden and started picking. Cupine who been working for over an hour. He was very hot and nearly all the apricots had been picked from the low branches. Even now he was starting to get tired. Poor Cupine.

At ten o'clock, Crocosmile arrived and the three animals worked happily together – singing and talking as they plucked the juicy apricots from the branches.

Soon after twelve o'clock Geelaugh arrived but the picking was almost complete. Very quickly Geelaugh plucked the fruit from the highest branches. The fruit baskets were full to overflowing and the four animals struggled to get them inside Dog's house.

Together they began washing, cutting and stoning the fruit. It was hard work but Happypotamus helped them when she arrived at two o'clock. She was good at cooking and soon the apricots were boiling away on the stove.

After a short rest, they started to clean up the mess. Cupine, whose body was closest to the floor, was working the hardest to clean up the sticky goo from the floor. They were all tired but happy.

The job was nearly finished when at half past four Wombrat strolled in. He whistled as he screwed the lids on the jam jars. But first he dipped a paw into each jar 'just to make sure the jam had cooked properly.' He licked his paw clean before 'tasting' the next jar. "Screwing on lids is very hard work," he said. "You are lucky that I was able to help you."

By five o'clock all the work was done. Proudly Dog looked at the fifty bottles of apricot jam. "Now I must pay you the money I promised you," she said.

Dog took out her purse and gave Wombrat a brand new five dollar note. "And take a jar of jam as you go," she said. "And here's your box of chocolates as well."

Wombrat snatched the note with one paw and grabbed the jar of jam and the chocolates in the other as he raced off to the supermarket to buy more chocolate.

Dog then gave Happypotamus five dollars. "And take a jar of jam as you go," she said.

Next, Dog gave Geelaugh five dollars. "Thank you for your help. Without you I would not have been able to pick the fruit at the top of the trees. And don't forget your jar of jam."

Geelaugh took the money and the jam but he had a big frown on his face. He thought to himself, "Wombrat only worked for half an hour and he was paid five dollars. I've been here since twelve o'clock and Dog gave me the same amount. Doesn't seem fair. But I guess it doesn't matter. I've got plenty of money. I can buy the latest CD to play when I buy that new navy blue car."

"Crocsmile, my good friend," said Dog. "You did such a good job helping Cupine pick the apricots. Here is your five dollars and a jar of jam. Buy something for your motorbike."

Crocsmile took the money but she wasn't happy. She didn't smile.

She had worked since ten o'clock and been given the same money as Geelaugh and Happypotamus. Even worse, she was given the same amount as Wombrat and he had worked less than an hour. "Not fair," she grumbled as she climbed onto her motorbike and sped off.

Cupine had finally finished cleaning the sticky mess off the floor. He had been there all day. He was tired, hungry and dirty. He would need a hot bath to get his spikes clean. Poor Cupine.

"Thank you my good friend," said Dog. "Here's the five dollars I promised, and a jar of jam. Sorry I have to give you coins. I don't have any notes left."

Cupine took the coins in his sticky paws and started to count – "one ---two ---three ---four ---five. Only five dollars! The same as the others!" Cupine was so upset his spikes stood up straight.

"What's the matter?" asked Dog looking very puzzled.

“The others didn’t work as long as me. I’ve been here, working hard, from sunrise to sunset. I’ve picked the fruit, carried the fruit, peeled the fruit, cut the fruit, stoned the fruit, boiled the fruit, stirred the fruit, bottled the fruit and cleaned up the mess. You should have paid me much more than the others. And you gave Wombrat a box of chocolates as well.”

Dog answered, “Good friend, didn’t I tell you that I would pay you five dollars? Didn’t you agree to work for five dollars?” Dog then added in a kind voice, “I have done you no wrong. I have paid you and all your friends what I promised.”

Poor Cupine?

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Source Notes and Discussion

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Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard: Matthew 20: 1 - 16

Does this story qualify for a “happy ending?” On face value, it is one of the more difficult parables for children to understand. Jesus intends a happy ending for all, whether we come to faith early or late. But children’s reaction will be “that’s not fair.” This story may help them to come to an understanding of God’s grace and mercy and that these attributes are much greater than fairness.