

## Wednesday Worship

1st July 2020

### Opening prayers

Welcome in the name of Christ.  
God's grace, mercy and peace be with you.

Loving God, we have come to worship you.  
*All* **Help us to pray to you in faith,  
to sing your praise with gratitude,  
and to listen to your word with eagerness;  
through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

For sunlight dancing on white-crested waves,  
*All* **Creative God, we offer our thanks and praise.**

For sunlight dappling forest glades,  
*All* **Creative God, we offer our thanks and praise.**

For sunlight gilding wheat and maize,  
*All* **Creative God, we offer our thanks and praise.**

For sunlight lengthening summer days,  
*All* **Creative God, we offer our thanks and praise**

### Introduction

Today we have the last in our series of five parables from Matthew's Gospel. This time we hear about how God's kingdom works through the story of a landowner who hires men throughout the day to work in his vineyard. At the end he surprises the men by paying them all the same amount of money. This isn't good business practice - so what's going on?

### Hymn: *May the mind of Christ my Saviour*

#### Prayers with lighting of a candle

For the sun's rising  
and its beams of precious warmth,  
*All* **thanks be to you, O God.**

For the morning's gleaming promise, plants awakening,  
flowers blooming, trees dancing in soft wind,  
*All* **thanks be to you, O God.**

For the air, warm and wet  
with summer's invitation to rest for a while  
from sorrow and difficulty,  
*All* **thanks be to you, O God.**

For the noontime heat  
and cool refreshing water,  
*All*     **thanks be to you, O God.**

For the long evenings  
stretching out like a blanket of restful sleep,  
*All*     **thanks be to you, O God.**

*All*     For the brilliant blue-black of night sky,  
silent stars dancing in flickering magic,  
**thanks be to you, O God.**

For this summer day,  
and for all days in which we see and feel your blessings,  
we give thanks to you,  
our Creator God.  
*All*     **Amen.**

### *1st Reading: Isaiah 55.1-11*

Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.  
Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.  
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.  
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander for the peoples.  
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near;  
let the wicked forsake their way,  
and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

### **Prayer of response**

Lord, in our times of difficulty  
help us to remember that you are a God  
who delights to give freely  
and who calls us to good things in you.

All **Amen.**

### **Psalm 37.1-9**

Do not fret because of the wicked;  
do not be envious of wrongdoers,  
for they will soon fade like the grass,  
and wither like the green herb.

Trust in the LORD, and do good;  
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.  
Take delight in the LORD,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD;  
trust in him, and he will act.  
He will make your vindication shine like the light,  
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,  
over those who carry out evil devices.

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.  
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.  
For the wicked shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

### **Prayer of response**

Lord, give us patience to wait for your promises  
without making it an excuse to do nothing.  
May we be full of hope in your righteousness  
and kept safe from despair.

All **Amen.**

### **2nd Reading: Ephesians 2.1-10**

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

### **Prayer of response**

Lord, we thank you for your love for us,  
by which we are saved and made one with Christ.  
As you call us to do good things strengthen us with your grace,  
that we may glorify you.

All **Amen.**

### **3rd Reading: Matthew 20.1-16**

'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." 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." 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.'

### **Prayer of response**

Lord our God,  
help us to remember your generosity to us,  
and not resent your goodness to others.  
May we all rejoice with those who rejoice,  
and mourn with those who mourn,  
remembering that we are all fellow-workers in your kingdom,  
and are all equally loved.

All **Amen.**

### **Hymn: Have faith in God, my heart**

### **Reflection**

Between 2004 and 2008 there was a TV series called “Supernanny”.

In this series an expert went around the country helping parents deal with their children’s behavioural problems, and in one programme the camera took us into a home with 5 boys who lied, were violent and had no respect for their parents.

So, in came Supernanny, and by the end of the week the boys’ behaviour was much improved.

She achieved this turnaround by promising the children rewards and prizes for doing what they were told.

In effect, the system was at least partly about “What’s in it for us if we do what you say?”

Today’s parable is part of **Jesus’** answer to the question, “What’s in it for us if we do what you say?”.

In Chapter 19, just before today’s Gospel reading, Peter says, in his usual subtle way, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”.

Jesus promises that the disciples will sit on thrones and be given a hundred times more than what they’ve given up.

I expect they felt great about that.

I expect they were pleased about being properly rewarded for following Jesus first and working through the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

I expect they felt it was only right and proper that if they worked and did what they were told they would get rewards and prizes.

There also seems to be an implication in Peter’s question that they’ve done more than everyone else, and so they should get something extra.

But just as they were relaxing and congratulating themselves they were pulled up short at the end of Chapter 19 with “but many who are first will be last, and the last will be first”.

I can just imagine the disciples saying, like the boys in Supernanny, children everywhere, the workers in the parable we’ve heard today, and probably all of us at times, perhaps especially as we have to deal with the pandemic and its associated problems, “It’s not fair!”.

And in human terms it **isn’t** fair.

Jesus expands on his provocative statement with today’s parable in a way that brings out the unfairness even more clearly.

He even rams the message home by repeating “the last will be first, and the first will be last” at the end of the parable.

I’m sure the trade unions would, quite rightly, have something to say if a shop paid the same amount to someone who only worked there Saturdays and someone who worked there full-time.

But this parable is about how things work in **God’s** kingdom, where everything is ultimately about grace.

Luckily for us, grace isn’t about human ideas of justice, fairness or getting what we deserve.

I say “luckily” because, as Paul says in Romans, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.

If God was being fair and just in our terms the kingdom would be pretty empty.

Grace says, “Look, you can’t buy a place in God’s kingdom. It’s worth more than you could possibly imagine. You can’t work your way in either because everything in God’s kingdom must be perfect and, let’s be honest, you get things wrong all the time. You have no right to be here but come in anyway because God loves you”.

Put another way, the value of getting in to God’s kingdom is so much higher than the value of any work we can do that we can only be given entry as a gift.

And if it’s a gift, we aren’t being cheated of prizes for being good.

It’s not that God doesn’t give his followers good things or value faithful service. But what he gives and will give us so far outweighs what we can earn or deserve that they can’t be considered our rightful wages.

I guess the real problem here is the implications of this generosity.

Just as the disciples may have been expecting a better class of eternal life because they were Jesus’ first followers, we can all fall into the trap of thinking we will get a better class of eternal life because of our faithful service.

But people who've been Christians from the cradle are loved and blessed the same as people who convert on their deathbeds.

Churchwardens, flower arrangers, organists, clergy and lay ministers have to rub shoulders with people who run a mile when they see a rota coming.

Lifelong criminals who turn to Jesus will get the same rewards as those who've kept every law in the book.

We don't know who grace will let in and who we'll share eternity with.

We have to open our hearts and minds to the possibility that the undesirable and the least deserving may get the same reward as us.

We have to accept and even rejoice in the fact that there are no ranks, long-service awards or stickers for good behaviour.

We need to become so much like Jesus that we can rejoice in what God gives us without trying to decide who else he should or shouldn't be generous to, or how much we should get compared to others.

This is the grace that saves the world long before it's condemned.

It's breathtakingly generous, beautiful, loving and joyful, but also outrageous, disturbing, shocking and uncontrollable.

And if we're not uncomfortable with it then maybe we haven't fully understood it.

### **Intercessions**

Father, you sent your Son to bring good news to the poor,  
sight to the blind,  
freedom to captives  
and salvation to your people:  
anoint us with your Spirit;  
rouse us to work in his name,  
to be a sign of hope in the darkness,  
and a source of compassion for the suffering.  
Father, by your Spirit

*All* **bring in your kingdom.**

Send us to bring help to the poor,  
especially those whose livelihoods are lost or threatened,  
and those who have to rely on food banks.  
Send us to bring freedom to the oppressed,  
remembering those who are mistreated because of  
colour, gender or sexuality.  
May we be ready to show your love to all.  
Father, by your Spirit

*All* **bring in your kingdom.**

Send us to tell the world  
the good news of your healing love.  
May the sick and worried,  
the isolated and afraid,  
find comfort, help and friendship.  
Father, by your Spirit

*All* **bring in your kingdom.**

Send us to those who mourn,  
and to those who are nearing death,  
to bring new hope and strength,  
and assurances of your promises in Christ.  
Father, by your Spirit

*All* **bring in your kingdom.**

God of mercy,  
*All* **you know us and love us and hear our prayer:  
keep us in the eternal fellowship  
of Jesus Christ our Saviour.  
Amen.**

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,  
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us.

*All* **Our Father, which art in heaven...**

### *Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness*

#### *Closing prayers*

The Father whose glory fills the heavens,  
cleanse us by his holiness  
and send us out to work in his vineyard.

*All* **Amen.**

The Son who has ascended to the heights,  
pour upon us the riches of his grace.

*All* **Amen.**

The Holy Spirit, the Comforter,  
equip us and strengthen us in all we do.

*All* **Amen.**

And the blessing...

Glory to God,  
*All* **whose power, at work among us,  
can do infinitely more  
than all we can ask or conceive;  
to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**