

Sunday 20th September 2020 - Thoughts and a Prayer

Matthew 20:1-16

The parable of the workers in the vineyard

20 'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ 'About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the market-place doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." ⁵ So they went.

'He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

⁷ "'Because no one has hired us," they answered.

'He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard."

⁸ 'When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first."

⁹ 'The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When

they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² "These who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day."

¹³ 'But he answered one of them, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

¹⁶ 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

The workers in the vineyard

Life can seem so unfair at times. 'It's not fair' seems to be one of those phrases children learn when they're stopped from doing something that they want to, or when they're not allowed to have something that they insist all their friends have, even if their claims are greatly exaggerated!

But we seem to have an expectation though that life should be fair, but I wonder sometimes if what we really want is to be treated *more* fairly than anyone else.

It was a good number of years ago when an ecumenical colleague told a story about some friends of his. They had been upgraded on their flight because economy class was full. They were absolutely delighted that they were sitting in much better seats than the ones they had paid for. The only downside was that the people they had joined in first class were not remotely happy, they were almost spitting with fury that these people who

hadn't paid the full price were being upgraded. It seemed so unfair.

It seemed unfair too to the workers who had worked all day in the vineyard that they were only being paid the same as those who had worked just the last hour, and it would do to us too if we were in the same position.

The parables that Jesus told were about everyday life situations so that they stuck in the minds of his listeners, and they would often have an unexpected twist. This parable is no different.

What does it tell us though about God? The first thing that strikes me is that God values every person equally. We are all important to God, whatever our background, whatever our education, whatever we've done, whatever we've been. God doesn't have favourites and God's kingdom is not like the world of George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' where some were more equal than others.

The second thing that strikes me is God's generosity. That's the basis of the landowner's retort in verse 15, and we see God's generosity displayed throughout the pages of the bible, Old Testament and New.

If we come away though feeling that this passage from Matthew's gospel is fundamentally unfair, then let us reflect for a moment that our God is unfair – unfairly generous, unfairly loving, unfairly gracious and that we are the recipients of that unfair generosity, love and grace. There's nothing that any of us can ever do to earn God's favour. All that we can do is to open our hands to receive it and invite him in to transform our lives.

If you have a copy of Singing the Faith please turn to StF 124, (For The Fruits Of All Creation) a hymn by Fred Pratt Green giving thanks to God for his generosity. It can also be found at H&P 342 and there's an interesting version of it at YouTube at <https://youtu.be/NZJwH89zsmk>

Prayer

Let us pray

Almighty God,
we thank you for the unfair generosity, love and grace
that you bestow upon us
we thank you that you have no favourites
we thank you that you love each and every person equally
whatever we may have done and whatever we may have
been.

We pray that you will help us to share and to show that
same spirit of generosity, love and grace to those we live
with, to those who are part of our families, to our
neighbours and work colleagues, to the world around us.
Prompt us, when we pray, with the names of those who
you want us to help.

We pray for all the churches in the circuit as they move
towards re-opening their buildings for worship and
community activities. We pray for the congregation at
Prestwood Methodist Church who are re-opening for
worship today for the first time since lockdown.

Nigel