



Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020: Trinity 15 Matthew 20 v1-6

## Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

### GATHERING BEFORE GOD

Make sure you are sitting comfortably.

I am in the presence of the Living God, Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

God, who in generous mercy  
sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church  
in the burning fire of your love:  
grant that your people may be fervent  
in the fellowship of the gospel  
that, always abiding in you,  
they may be found steadfast in faith  
and active in service;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever Amen

### REFLECTION

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Ask God to speak to you through the passage that you are about to read.

**BIBLE READING:** Matthew 20:1-16

"The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard. He went out again to the marketplace at nine o'clock and saw some men standing there doing nothing, so he told them, 'You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage.' So they went. Then at twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. It was nearly five o'clock when he went to the marketplace and saw some other men still standing there. 'Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?' he asked them. 'No one hired us,' they answered. 'Well, then, you go and work in the vineyard,' he told them. "When evening came, the owner told his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with those who were hired last and ending with those who were hired first.' The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. So when the men who were the first to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more; but they too were given a silver coin each. They took their money and started grumbling against the employer. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun—yet you paid them the same as you paid us!' 'Listen, friend,' the owner answered one of them, 'I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?'"

*Read through the passage once. Read it quietly out loud but say each word out loud.*

*Try and take note of any words or phrases that strike you.*

*Say that word or phrase quietly out loud or underline it with a pen.*

*Read the passage a second time.*

*As you read, think about how the word or phrase you notice might speak to you today.*

*After you have read the passage again, sit in silence and try and come up with a sentence or two that sums up what you think the word or phrase means for you today.*

*Read the passage a third time and prayerfully think about what Christ has said to you.*

#### **SOME THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:**

In some parts of the world today men and women stand on the edge of a street corner or at a roundabout at dawn, sometimes before it's light.

They wait for a truck to stop and offer them work in gardening or cleaning or buildings work. Sometimes they get work on a shop floor, just for few hours, or if they are lucky for the whole day. The following morning they join the desperate waiting to queue again.

This story, this scene that Jesus paints was one that people would have related to easily. The surprise for Jesus' listeners was the way in which the last who went to work got paid the same as the first. If we were honest, as a child and as adults we have felt the same surprise and resentment at times. It's the same surprise and resentment that we see in the words and actions of the elder son on the return of the prodigal, the younger son.

In the time of Jesus many of the religious leaders and pious people were not only surprised but resentful that Jesus was welcoming and spent so much time with people who had just grasped something of the kingdom of God. So much time with the new kids on the block, many of whom they saw as reprobates, people who had not been faithful in worship and to the law. The people who had not kept the religion of Moses alive in the face of Hellenistic oppression.

In the understanding of the religious leaders of his day there was the belief that God would reward the faithful in this life and in the life to come for their efforts in living and keeping the Law of Moses. The greater the effort, the greater the rewards. This concept of rewards is seen in some of the words of Jesus and in the writing of Paul. What was new in Jesus' words was that the rewards are equally shared, there is no disparity among the faithful. Beyond this, for Jesus' time and for our time is the radical affirmation of the generosity of God which has no limits, so radical that it not simply staggering and inconceivable but is offensive for some.

This same radical generosity of God reflects in a little saying of Jesus.

"He makes his sun rise on people whether they are good or evil. He lets rain fall on them whether they are just or unjust." (Matt 5:45).

It is seen in the seed that is thrown on every bit of ground and given every chance to flourish. It is the generosity of the Spirit that gives the fig tree another season to flourish.

The lack of appreciation of the radical nature of the generosity of God and its implication can be found in every area of church life today; where for instance, when newcomers come to church and want to get involved and take the lead to move things to a new direction, the response is sometimes :-

"Who are these new guys telling us what we should do, they have not lived and struggled with us in keeping the church going all these years."

"Why should they benefit from all our labours when they have not contributed anything?"

"We don't know them, they have no history with us, how can they know anything, why should we be generous to them?"

Simply put, if God's generosity towards us is so great and so undeserved even when sometimes we think we are deserving, how much more should we be generous in thinking and acting towards others, particularly with those who want to be part of the church community?

Jesus says, "Freely you have received; freely give." (Matt 10:8).

What might this radical, surprising, even offensive generosity of God, what Paul calls the foolishness of God, look like practically for me and my church community today?

What would it be like if the generosity of God to me meant I always gave people the benefit of the doubt as to their motives and actions?

What would it be like not simply to do what is asked of me or what I feel I should do, but to go the extra mile? (Matt 5:41).

To give something of our deepest self, is this not the generosity of God in practise?

What would it be like as a church if we give to the wider community something of what we have with no thought of wanting anything in return?

What would it be like to live out this radical generosity of God as a person and as a church community?

To give with no desire or expectation of even a thank you?

## OUR PRAYERS

O generous Christ you are all and within all things.

And all things come from you.

You are the giver and the gift.

Help us always to recognise

your love for us without hesitation.  
Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

For the church I pray here and in every land.  
Grant us all the generosity to be your hands and heart.  
Grant us the courage to stand with you in the face of doubt and opposition.  
To say yes to your Spirit that seeks to share your love with all people.  
Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

Bless all employers with a spirit of fairness and grace.  
We remember all who have to queue for work,  
all who depend on social benefits.  
We pray for all who are without work,  
for those on low incomes,  
for those who cannot get work through prejudice.  
May all who prosper be generous and willing to share with the needy.  
Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

O Christ all life comes from you and is held and sustained by the Spirit.  
I pray for all who are sick and troubled at this time who long for health in body, mind or spirit.  
May they have the knowledge of your generosity and the warmth and healing of your Spirit.  
Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

For all whoes experience of living is now renewed on a more distance shore.  
Grant them I pray the gift of peace and light with you .  
You are the one who says,  
I am with you always, even till the end of time.  
Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

### A PRAYER CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS

God of compassion, be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation. In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope; in their darkness, be their light; through him who suffered alone on the cross, but reigns with you in glory, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen