

20/9/20 Trinity 15 Matthew 20:1-16

I'm sure some of us are members of some club or organisation -though unfortunately a lot will have stopped because of Coronavirus - but those groups we belong to will have rules to join and to abide by as well as values which they promote. The reading today follows in the same vein as last Sunday when I spoke about judgement and God's standards, as the reading from Matthew is about heavenly values and what is required to become members of God's kingdom.

Today in the Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Men were hanging around in the market-place waiting to be hired for work and early in the morning, the owner of a vineyard offers them one denarius each to do a days work so, happy with that, they go off to the vineyard. At 9.00 the owner goes to the market place again and hires more men, offering them the same deal, then again at 12, at 3 then at 5 were men were still stood around because no one hired them so the same offer is made to them and off they go to the vineyard.

By this time, the working day practically over and when payment time came, the ones who were hired last were asked to come in first and they received one denarius. The ones hired early in the morning came in last and received - one denarius. There was some grumbling when they received the same as they'd expected to be paid more. "We've been here all day, working in the hot sun and they get paid the same as us for only working one hour?" The owner says, "Hang, on. I haven't cheated you, you all agreed to do a days work for one denarius, which you did thank you very much and that's what you agreed to." It was his money and if he was generous enough to pay everyone the same, no

matter how much work or time they'd put it, was up to him.

This illustrates perfectly what Jesus was teaching when he said, "those who are last will be first and those who are first will be last," which explains his Father's extravagant love and generosity; He is the owner of the vineyard and believers are the workers. Those who come to faith at whatever point in their life will receive the same as faithful believers who have served all their lives – just as the workers were promised a fair wage in return for their service, regardless of whenever they started. Everyone is equal in God's eyes and Jesus addresses the workers' anger at being treated as equals to those who worked less.

His teaching was harsh at times and another difficult aspect involves those who will be in heaven who we wouldn't expect to be there. There are many horrible people, some who have committed evil crimes - but some have repented at some point, quite often in prison, as the end of their lives approached and Jesus tells us that they will be admitted to God's kingdom - and this is where it gets difficult. I've had conversations with people who can't understand this and believe the person is saying sorry with their fingers crossed and it's not genuine. Yes, there is that but God knows every heart and when someone is genuinely repentant, He extends His generosity even to them.

This teaching is timely as it comes just before Jesus speaks with the disciples about his death for a third time; his death on the cross which would save all believers, and guarantee that none were exempted from God's grace.

It doesn't seem fair when others are treated equally in these situations but Jesus teaches us about God's generosity and mercy, who has a big heart full of grace, which He bestows upon us all. But just to say, there will be a reckoning as last week Jesus taught that all will have to give an account of themselves

before God; no one will get away with anything they've done in life and again, whatever happens is between them and God.

So, instead of focussing and getting angry about what God's grace gives to others which we may not think is fair, reflect upon all that his grace has given to us, we've so much to be thankful for. Heaven's values *are* different from ours as God's grace isn't limited by what we think of as fairness or equality. At the end of the day, none of us deserves the gifts he offers and all we have. It is hard to let go of human ideas and perceptions were God is, but we need to learn to trust in heavenly ones and accept God's values, generosity and open heartedness to those who are regarded as unequal and undeserving.

"The last will be first, and the first will be last."

Amen