

Reflection for Trinity 16. Matthew 20: 1-16

The danger with parables can be that we look for all sorts of hidden meanings in the text, whereas, by and large, they were meant to illustrate just one point. This story about the workers in the vineyard is not then a handbook for trade unions or human resource departments or even an illustration of how not to do things. The workers who have borne the heat of the day are, unsurprisingly, not happy that the latecomers receive the same pay for a few short hours. We too would feel the same and start to mutter things like a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and similar aggrieved slogans. We see those who feel that their pay has not kept pace with inflation or not giving them the status that they may feel they are entitled to taking industrial action to right their perceived wrongs. We might ask why those workers who were engaged at the last were not available for work earlier in the day. They say because no one asked them. Could it be that they were the sort that no one wanted around, the misfits, the undesirables.

Jesus does not intend this as a comment on social justice. It is, in fact, a very unlikely scenario. It is, however, a warning to us all that pride is a real and ever-present danger. A warning that there are no special places in the Kingdom of God. Those who have been Christians all their lives will have no higher status than later converts. There are no passes to jump the queue, all are welcome, all are wanted. It is a stark reminder to us all not to climb on our high horse, to say that we are better than others. It may be that Jesus was warning his disciples to be wary of status. It is a warning that has been ignored all too often in many walks of life, even the Church. We often hear people say, 'well, after all they have done!' The point of the story is that what we get from having served God is not a wage or payment or even a reward for what we have done.

The main point is that is that we cannot earn a place or status, we come by God's grace, God's love and generosity. The owner of the vineyard says, '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.' God is out there searching for everyone, the good, the bad and the ugly, the old stagers, the newcomers, the late arrivals, we are equally promised our share of God's love and his grace.

*Loving and righteous God,
you are far more generous to us,
and to all who work in your kingdom,
more than we desire or deserve.
Make us generous to others
as you have been to us.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.*