

**Call to Worship**

These words based on Psalm 145 are for our thinking today: 'We will extol you, O Lord our God and king, and bless your name for ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, God's greatness is unsearchable. We celebrate your mighty deeds, and proclaim your abundant goodness. For you, O Lord, are gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Let us worship God, let us praise God in heart, soul, mind and strength.

**Hymn CH4 159 – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray;

Gracious Lord, Loving Heavenly Father, approachable and present, dependable and true, we come into your presence this morning. We come seeking to discover you. We come longing to be nourished by you. We come gasping for your life-giving spirit.

Yet, there are certain times, when the complexities of life and the weight of challenge dominates our lives. For, we find it hard to regain a sense of calm, to regain a feeling of peace.

We search this way and that; we search high and low; we expend our remaining energies, trying so hard to rescue ourselves from the feelings of despair that cling to us.

Lord God, if only we would turn to you; if only we could get over our own self-bravado; if only we had the sense to rely less on self and be more ready to turn to the source of strength that you promise.

Merciful God, whilst we are inclined to forget you, you never forget us. We are sorry for turning the other way. We are sorry for denying you the opportunity to forge that relationship of tender intimacy with us.

So, this morning, in this moment, here and now, let us find in the silence, the stillness, a sign of your presence with us. Reveal yourself to us...

*Silence*

Holy God, Loving Father, take that spark of faith in us, and make it grow, and grow and grow. Let your love explode within our hearts and let confidence, strength, hope and security, return to our lives.

This we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

### **Reading: Matthew 20: 1 - 16 (taken from The Good News Translation)**

#### **The Workers in the Vineyard**

**20** “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. <sup>2</sup>He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>He went out again to the marketplace at nine o'clock and saw some men standing there doing nothing, <sup>4</sup>so he told them, ‘You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage.’ <sup>5</sup>So they went. Then at twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>‘No one hired us,’ they answered. ‘Well, then, you go and work in the vineyard,’ he told them.

<sup>8</sup>“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.’ <sup>9</sup>The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>They took their money and started grumbling against the employer. <sup>12</sup>‘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!’ <sup>13</sup>‘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. <sup>14</sup>Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. <sup>15</sup>Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?’”

<sup>16</sup> And Jesus concluded, “So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last.”

## Hymn CH4 180 – Give thanks with a grateful heart,

### Sermon – ‘Workers & Wages’

One day a pessimistic man spotted some money crumpled up on the ground. He picked up, flattened it out, and discovered it was a 10 Euro note. ‘That’s just my luck,’ the man complained. ‘If someone else had found this, it would have been a 20 Euro note!’ Complainers look at the negative side of every situation. They never give thanks for what they have, but gripe because it’s not more. So, today, I want to ask you – ‘are you thankful, or are you a complainer?’

You know, if you want to upset people very quickly in today’s world, all you have to do is begin to talk about people’s salaries. Have you found, did you ever find yourself comparing your wages to someone else’s wage? Maybe you’re a teacher and you try and compare your wage with a doctors’? Maybe you’re an accountant and try and compare your salary with a lawyers’? Or maybe you’re a Minister in the Church of Scotland and you try to compare you stipend with the salary of a retired footballer, who now presents television programmes. This week, the BBC, published its annual list of its best paid presenters. One former footballer has agreed to take a 23% pay cut, which still leaves them on a seven figure salary. When I saw this earlier this week, I came to the odd conclusion that I do the same amount of ‘presenting’ for far less pay! I’m not jealous – honest!!!

Yet, seriously, money and salaries are words that can cause all kinds of tensions within us and it is with a bit of this tense and conflictive mood that we approach today’s Gospel reading.

Now, since the beginning of Lockdown, we have, on the whole, been looking at Jesus’ parables. I wonder if you have ever noticed that Jesus’ parables are never about the Church? Not one of His parables is about preaching or buildings or singing. Jesus’ parables are from everyday life. They are from the market place. The farm. The vineyard and the family. Today’s parable is about salaries and wages and a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work. Or is it?

Jesus is telling a parable, another about the Kingdom of Heaven. Another that uses imagery of landowners, harvesters and vineyards. A landowner goes out at 6 am to hire men to work in his vineyard. He offers them a 'regular wage' for a day of work. He goes out again at 9 am, Noon, 3 pm and 5 pm, and hires more and more men. At the end of the day, the landowner pays every one of them a day's wage. All of them. That means that the workers who have worked 10 hours, 8 hours, 5 hours and 2 hours all get the same wage at the end of the day.

Naturally, this upsets some of the workers. Those who have worked all day were suddenly not as happy with the wage they had received, because those who worked only worked for two hours also received the same salary. However, in verse 13, the landowner will not hear it: *"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. <sup>14</sup> Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?" <sup>16</sup> And Jesus concluded, "So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last."*

I wonder, how would you have felt, if you had been working from 6 am, in the vineyard, that morning and received the same pay as the person who began working at 5 pm? Would you have been angry? It's not right is it? You have worked all day and you get is a measly silver coin! The same coin the 5 pm starter is now holding in the palm of their hand! Wouldn't it make you resentful or a little angry?

Yet, do we feel the same outrage if we remember that this parable **is not** just about money **but is about** the Kingdom of Heaven and God's Grace? In the parable, the landowner is God, and we are the ones who are being asked to come and work in the vineyard. To be workers in the harvesting. Now, being a worker in God's vineyard is about having a relationship with God. It's about being a member of the Kingdom of God. All our lives, like the landowner, God is giving out invitations to come and work in the vineyard. Will we accept? Well, that is up to us. God offers many invitations and just hopes that we will agree and come and take part.

Yet, for some of us, we have been working in the vineyard for a long time. God invited and we accepted and now we are part of it. Part of the Kingdom, as we work to make God's Kingdom a place on earth. Maybe your piece of work for the Kingdom is to deliver flowers, or the Church magazine. Maybe it is to be an Elder, a member of the Guild.

Maybe, it's to be a friend to a neighbour, or to think of new ways that we a church family can reach out to the community which surrounds us. We do it because we want others to experience God's love and grace in the same way that we have. We have found a good thing and when that happens do you not want to share it with others.

Yet, as we go on in the parable, those who have worked all day in the vineyard are not happy with same pay being given to those who have worked less and the landowner asks: *"'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. <sup>14</sup> Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?'" <sup>16</sup> And Jesus concluded, "So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last."*

I wonder, do we as Christians, ever find ourselves in that situation? Do we resent it when God's grace and love is not exclusively ours? In part, I think our reaction comes from our feeling that we have done something to earn God's grace. Even if we don't say it out loud, within our hearts, I think, we believe that if we live better, more in line with God's will for us, that we will be more deserving of God's love and grace. So, when somebody else waltzes into the Kingdom and gets God's grace after they have been doing nothing to prove themselves worthy of it, when they haven't been living the way we have been living, we are frustrated at the least! And we ask ourselves, why have been working so hard for so long?

The answer lies in our ability to understand grace, to believe that God's grace is what God's grace is. As I have said before and said often, God's grace is free – we do not need to work for it. It is without price. No payment necessary. You could not pay for it if you tried! Can you believe that?

God's grace is available for all, no matter what our age is. No matter how much work we have put in to the Kingdom. I don't know about you but I often find that it's not always easy living life as a Christian. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's challenging and sometimes it seems to be nigh on impossible but I wouldn't trade it for anything else. I would never want to struggle with that emptiness, with that search for meaning, without knowing the love of God. It is in knowing God that we can experience His love, mercy, forgiveness and grace day by day.

That is why we should be in such a hurry to share the Good News about God's love with others. So, that they too can join in this rich life of trying to walk with God and trying to work for His Kingdom. God's grace is free. There is an unending supply and it is not handed out as a result of the amount of work that you do for God's Kingdom. You can take as much of God's love as you can stand. God chooses to give each of us an invitation. You just have to decide if you want to come or not. So, in the next seven days will you be thankful for what you have received or will you be a complainer?

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Hymn – Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, (10,000) reasons**

#### **Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray;

Generous God, thank you for loving us and for eternally being willing to forgive us and let us rebuild a relationship with you.

Lord Jesus, you showed us by your life how we can let go of hate and choose to love and reconcile with our enemies.

As we look at our broken world we see so many people who have inherited centuries of hate and violence and can see no way out except through a continuation of hate and violence.

We thank you for the people engaging in the hard work of peace and reconciliation a work that needs everyone to sit at the table and be open to each other.

We pray for the people whose lives have been destroyed by hate and violence who continue to live in fear and anxiety and see no way to peace and safety.

We thank you for the people using their gifts to enable people to find safe places to live and work to feed their families.

We pray for the people whose lives have been impacted in so many different ways by the pandemic of Covid-19; for the radical changes that have forced them to adapt and cope with this new way of living.

We thank you for the people who have led and advised us through these strange days, for all who have worked hard to help us find a way forward and who have put aside

any differences they may have had and chosen to work together with others who can bring the changes we need.

Lord, may we be willing to make the changes we need and to let go of our fears and mistrust of others, so that together we can all move forward and find a way of peace and reconciliation that works for everyone, whoever and wherever they are. Amen.

### **The Sacrament of Holy Communion<sup>i</sup>**

#### **Invitation**

This table is spread  
For the old and the young  
For the long-timers and the new-comers  
For those who feel at home and those who are just settling in  
It is the table of our Lord  
Where grace is extended to all  
So come and join the feast  
You for whom this is new  
And you who do this often  
Here, know the grace of God  
embraces you.  
Feel welcome, valued and affirmed  
As God meets us here in bread and in wine.

#### **Narrative**

Jesus gathered friends around him  
To teach, to heal,  
to live, to love, to laugh  
Over meals they shared stories and created memories together.  
And the night he was betrayed, sharing supper with his friends,  
Jesus took bread,  
He broke it, blessed it and shared it  
And said: Do this to remember me  
As he passed around the cup after supper  
He said: This cup tells of a new relationship made possible with God  
Drink this to remember me.  
Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup  
you remember my dying for you.

#### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God we bring you our thanks today for memories  
Memories created with loved ones now lost  
Memories created new every day with those with whom we now share life

You are a God who never forgets  
A God who loves us - not because of who we have been  
Or because of our potential  
But because of who we are now  
Your beloved children  
You welcome us to this table  
Those of us for whom this is a familiar ritual  
And those of us for whom it is new  
You welcome us  
And you give every moment new significance  
Finding ourselves known and loved and welcomed at your table  
we bring with us today  
those who feel rejected  
those who have never known a place set for them at any table  
and those whose memories of table  
are too far in the past to remember  
or so traumatic that they have tried to forget.  
We bring those who feel their value is only in what they can bring  
who have never known themselves valued for who they are.  
As we meet your generosity here  
we pray for those who withhold from others  
what is rightfully theirs.  
For all those we exclude or overlook in our everyday.  
May our experience of sharing at your table today  
transform us in the way we make room for others  
and in the way that we recreate memories  
that honour your love shown for us here in the symbols of bread and wine  
your body broken for us, your love poured out.  
So send your Spirit on this bread and wine that we share,  
May we be fed, nourished, held and changed.  
May our horizons be expanded  
our certainties challenged  
and our memories made new  
as we meet you in this feast.  
Amen

### **Fraction**

Jesus, the night he was betrayed, took bread, blessed it broke it and shared it.  
We do this to remember him.

After supper, he took the cup, symbol of a new start with God. Sharing it, he said:  
Do this to remember me.



We meet Jesus here and celebrate the generosity of God.  
Break this bread. Drink this cup. Make room for others.  
Know God's welcome healing you today.

**Prayer after communion**

At your table O God we find welcome.

At your table we find healing.

At your table we find grace enough to spill over into our daily lives.

Filled with your spirit may we go from here to practice generosity

creating a new reality for those who expect only rejection

making room for those who have known only exclusion

And so may we usher in your new kingdom

where the last shall be first

and the first shall be last.

Amen

**Hymn CH4 259 – Beauty for brokenness,**

**Benediction**

God's unlimited love and grace be with us as we close our time of worship. Let us commit ourselves to taking this love and grace out into the world in which we live and move.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us you and all who you love, this day and always. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Written by the Rev. Liz Crumlish <http://tableliturgy.blogspot.com/>