



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

20th SEPTEMBER 2020

TRINITY 15

READINGS FOR TODAY

Jonah 3 v 10 to end of 4
Philippians 1 v 21 - end
Matthew 20 v 1 - 16

PARISH OFFICE: Monday & Friday 9 – 30 am to 11 – 30 am
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BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161
WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk



'The last will be first, and the first will be last'

COLLECT FOR – TRINITY 15

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.

THIS WEEK

WEDNESDAY HOLY COMMUNION 9 – 30 am

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – HARVEST

Deuteronomy 8 v 7 – 18; 2 Corinthians 9 v 6 – 15;
Luke 12 v 16 - 30

CONGRATULATIONS TO THOSE CELEBRATING THEIR BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK ESPECIALLY:

ROGER HEARING (TODAY); CALLUM BOUD (25TH)

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY:

DAPHNE SHENTON; WYN LONG

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 – this is a confidential service.

HARVEST CELEBRATION

Next Sunday 27th September. Donations of tins, packets etc will be welcomed. They will be used for our Care and Share outside church. Any fresh produce will be sold and the proceeds sent to Step by Step.

At 6 pm there will be an online Taize Harvest service. Details of how to join will be given next Sunday

CARE AND SHARE

Food is being left outside church for people to take for themselves, or to share with others who they know are in need. The shelves are usually being emptied each day. If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. please bring it to church with you or leave it on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING

This meeting, postponed from April, will now be on Sunday 18th October in church. We will be having a shorter service of Family Communion at 10 am and the meeting will follow immediately after. We hope to be finished by 11 – 15 am.

Nomination forms are in the middle of church for 4 PCC members and for one churchwarden, as Charles will be standing down.

SHOEBOX APPEAL

Shoebbox time is here again! There are some ready to fold boxes and leaflets at the back of the church. NO toothpaste, sweets or 4 suit cards please, BUT homemade stuffed toys are allowed if stuffed with proper toy stuffing. Boxes can be made on line for £20, which includes the 'postage' and you can choose items from a limited list. There will be a box for donations in church but no big packing party this year, unless the rules change. Thank You. Barbara Rose

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY BOXES

Because banking is more difficult this year, if it is at all possible, please count the money in your box yourself, then give me a cheque – made out to 'The Children's Society'. I will give you a receipt in the form of a new label to seal your box for next year. Thank you for your help.

I will be selling Christmas cards again this year. Mary Lamont.

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

All: Visit us with your salvation
and sustain us with your gracious Spirit.

Blessed are you, Sovereign God, creator of all,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You founded the earth in the beginning
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
In the fullness of time you made us in your image,
and in these last days you have spoken to us
in your Son Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.
As we rejoice in the gift of your presence among us
let the light of your love always shine in our hearts,
your Spirit ever renew our lives
and your praises ever be on our lips.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

All Visit us with your salvation
and sustain us with your gracious Spirit.

This hymn is said or sung:

Refrain:

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all.*

1. Each little flow'r that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings.
2. The purple-headed mountains,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky.
3. The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.
4. The tall trees in the greenwood,
The meadows where we play,
The rushes by the water,
To gather every day.
5. He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Come, Holy Spirit of God,

All and search our hearts with the light of Christ.

(L) Seek the Lord while he may be found,
All: call upon him while he is near.

(L) Let the wicked abandon their ways
All: and the unrighteous their thoughts.

(L) Turn back to the Lord, who will have mercy;
All: to our God who will richly pardon.

A time of silence and self-examination is kept.

All: Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing
and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(L) Blessed be the Lord,
All: who has heard the voice of our prayer.

(L) Therefore shall our hearts dance for joy
All: and in our song will we praise our God.

All say The Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We now say the collect for Trinity 15 (see first page):

*Read Jonah 3 v 10 to end of 4 followed by
Psalm 145 v 1 – 8 concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read Philippians 1 v 21 - end

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.
Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.
You have the words of eternal life.

All: Alleluia.

*Now read Matthew 20 v 1 – 16 Here are some thoughts on
today's readings from Fr Keith:*

I must confess to liking the old Carry On films from the
60's and 70's. One of my favourites has always been,
'Carry on at your Convenience' – the characteristic
double meaning being, of course, that it is set around a
factory making sanitary ware. A running joke is the
regular strikes that are called by the belligerent shop
steward on the slightest of pretexts. Immediately, they

hear 'everybody out' all the workforce down tools and the factory comes to a halt, lurching into another crisis.

Somehow, that all came to mind when I read today's Gospel about the labourers in the vineyard and their wage dispute. In Jesus' story those who have toiled all day in the hot sun receive no more than those only hired for the last hour. I can picture their shop steward shouting 'everybody out', and getting pickets posted on the gate the next day to prevent the owner of the vineyard getting any more workers until his pay policy is changed!

When we read this story, I think a lot of us would be sympathetic with those workers who had done more than the others. A fair days' wage for a fair days' work is what they were asking for, and what is wrong with that – wouldn't we expect the same? So, what message is Jesus getting across in this story which, on the face of it, seems to be promoting gross unfairness?

Well, the key to understanding it lies in Jesus' opening words – 'The Kingdom of heaven is like'. This isn't actually a story about labour relations, or fairness in the workplace, it's about how you get into the Kingdom of Heaven. As human beings we are wedded to the idea that the harder you work the greater will be your reward. But, true though that may be when it comes to earning money in business, or in passing exams, it isn't true when it comes to admission into God's Kingdom.

Jesus is clear that entry into heaven cannot be earned by us, but is down to the generosity of God in his great mercy. Underlying this story is the fact that we humans are sinful, and, by our own efforts can never bridge the gap that sin creates between us and God. It is only because he chooses to be generous in his forgiveness of us, through the cross, that we can ever gain a place with Him for ever. In the context of the Kingdom of Heaven, 'points do not make prizes'!

Paul makes the same argument about faith and grace, as opposed to works, in his various letters. Some of the people Paul was dealing with had the view that you could earn your way into heaven with good works – the more you did, the better your place there would be. But Paul is quite clear that it is 'only by grace, we can enter' as the modern hymn puts it. Of course, we *should* be doing good works as Christians, but not as a means to an end, but purely out of obedience to God's command to love one another. We should have no other motivation than that, otherwise we are only being selfish.

In our Old Testament reading today from the Book of Jonah, we have another example of someone complaining that God's generosity is unfair. Jonah had tried to avoid God's instruction to go to Ninevah to call the people to repentance. His time in the belly of the fish put paid to that tactic! When he did get on with the job, his mission was successful. He should have been pleased, but that wasn't the 'fair' outcome that Jonah had in his own mind for the Ninevites. In forgiving them, Jonah thought God was being far too generous. They deserved to be punished, in his view, and so he sulked. The incident with the bush, that God causes to grow to shelter Jonah, and then to wither, is a demonstration to Jonah that he is not thinking in the way that God does about the people God cares about. Jonah is being selfish and self-absorbed, and that is not the sort of behaviour that God approves of! God cares to a degree that we so often, do not, He rejoices when people repent, and Jonah should have been rejoicing too.

The God we worship is far and away more generous than we are, both in the gifts and talents he showers on us, and in his love for us. He is willing to forgive, and admit people into his kingdom, much more readily than we would be. As in last week's Gospel, we learn that God's forgiveness is lavish, whereas ours is often grudging or non-existent.

The other aspect of Jesus' story today is another warning, this time about one-upmanship. Those of us who have been Christians for a long time, coming to church regularly, are like the labourers who have been in the vineyard all day. That being the case, we might be tempted to think that we are somehow more highly valued by God than those who come to the faith later in life – the labourers who have only worked for the last hour. Not so, says Jesus. All will get the same reward – the joy and peace of being with God for ever, and what higher thing could anyone wish for than that?

So, once again, we are reminded that God's ways and his thinking are very different from ours. God admits us into His Kingdom not as a result of our own efforts, because we are too sinful to be able to achieve that. We enter solely because of His love for us and by His grace. The person who comes to faith late will have exactly the same reward as the lifelong faithful – all are equal to God.

What we need to concentrate on, then, is emulating God's loving generosity in our relationships with others. Unlike the day long labourers in the vineyard, we are not to get angry or jealous about people who take longer to respond to God's call than us. We need to be grateful that God is so lavishly forgiving and try to be the same, setting a good example and praying for grace to reflect His love and compassion to others in the way we live our lives. In other words, aim to be more like Jesus. Amen.

Now pause for your own reflections, and then we say the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

We now say together:

All You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.

- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.

Our prayers, today, are written by Fr Keith

Heavenly Father, we ask for your continued guidance for your church. Keep it faithful to your calling to spread the Gospel of your love and generosity to the whole world. We thank you for the freedom that we enjoy to worship you here, and pray for those, who do not have that freedom. May they be given courage and strength to carry on. Bless our Archbishops Justin and Stephen, and our Bishops Andrew and Jo – that they will lead us in truth and set us a good example of love and service.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, help us to remember that all people on the Earth are our brothers and sisters. Help us to get better at sharing the gifts you have given us, and looking after the natural resources you have put at our disposal. Turn us from selfishness and exploitation, keep us from prejudice and discrimination, and let love and compassion be our watchwords. Give wisdom to all in authority and teach them to use their power for the good of all and not just the few.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, may those experiencing new lockdown measures keep to the rules and receive the care and support that they need. Be with the lonely and isolated. May they feel your loving presence with them. Keep safe all volunteers and those working on the frontline battling the pandemic. Give hope to the unemployed and those facing financial difficulties, may they be aware of your care and support always.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, may all who are sick feel the touch of your healing hands. Give them that inner peace that only you can give. Strengthen all who work in the health service especially those who are feeling under intense pressure at this time, and be with all who are caring for others at home. May they have the gift of patience and compassion and the motivation to carry on.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the example of the faithful who have gone before us. In your mercy grant them a place in your eternal Kingdom. We remember especially Daphne Shenton and Wyn Long who have died recently, and all those whose anniversary of death occurs at this time.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for calling us into your church and supporting us through these difficult times. We pray that you will show us how best to help others in our church and neighbourhood. We give thanks for those who are being baptised at this time, especially Harry Marshall. As you grow your church around the world, draw us all closer together in bonds of love and friendship.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We ask the prayers of Mary, Peter and all the saints, as we commend ourselves and each other to your unfailing love, saying:

Merciful Father: accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may be said or sung:

To God be the glory
Great things He has done
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son;
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear His voice;
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice:
O come to the Father
Through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory;
Great things He has done*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Chorus

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our worship, when Jesus we see.

Chorus

Let us pray:

(L) Lord God, defend your Church from all false teaching and give to your people knowledge of your truth, that we may enjoy eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All: God of glory, by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell: fill your Church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

All: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us, and all who we love, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

A lamp or candle may be lit.

- 1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? ♦
The Lord is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?
- 2 Though a host encamp against me,
my heart shall not be afraid, ♦
and though there rise up war against me,
yet will I put my trust in him.
- 3 One thing have I asked of the Lord
and that alone I seek: ♦
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
- 4 To behold the fair beauty of the Lord ♦
and to seek his will in his temple.
- 5 For in the day of trouble
he shall hide me in his shelter; ♦
in the secret place of his dwelling shall he hide me
and set me high upon a rock.
- 6 Therefore will I offer in his dwelling an oblation
with great gladness; ♦
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

All: Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon(St Matthew) 119 v 33 – 40 & 89 -96;
Tue 33; Wed 119 v 33 - 56; Thurs 40; Fri 35; Sat 46,
ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All: God's love was revealed among us
so that we might live through Jesus.

- 1 Beloved, let us love one another,
for love is of God; ♦
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
- 2 Whoever does not love does not know God, ♦
for God is love.
- 3 In this the love of God was revealed among us, ♦
that God sent his only Son into the world,
so that we might live through him.
- 4 In this is love,
not that we loved God but that he loved us, ♦
and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.
- 5 Beloved, since God loved us so much, ♦
we ought also to love one another.
- 6 For if we love one another, God abides in us, ♦
and God's love will be perfected in us.

All: Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: God's love was revealed among us
so that we might live through Jesus.

Readings:

Monday: Ecclesiastes 5 v 4 – 12; Matthew 19 v 16 - end
Tuesday: 1 Chronicles 28 v 11 - end; Mark 11 v 12 - 26
Wednesday: 1 Chron. 29 v 1 - 9; Mark 11 v 27 - end
Thursday: 1 Chronicles 29 v 10 – 20; Mark 12 v 1 - 12
Friday: 1 Chronicles 29 v 21 - end; Mark 12 v 13 - 17
Saturday: 2 Chronicles 1 v 1 - 13 ; Mark 12 v 18 - 27

Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All: You have looked with favour on your lowly servant,
from this day all generations will call her blessed.

- 1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
- 2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.
- 3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation to generation.
- 4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit.
- 5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.
- 6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
- 7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

All You have looked with favour on your lowly servant, from this day all generations will call her blessed.

Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week (see first page)

(On Monday – the collect for St Matthew:

*O almighty God,
whose blessed Son called Matthew the tax collector
to be an apostle and evangelist:
give us grace to forsake the selfish pursuit of gain
and the possessive love of riches
that we may follow in the way of your Son Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.)*

O God our protector,
by whose mercy the world turns safely into darkness
and returns again to light:
we give into your hands our unfinished tasks,
our unsolved problems,
and our unfulfilled hopes;
for you alone are our sure defence
and bring us lasting peace
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This hymn may be said or sung:

Let all the world, in every corner, sing: My God and King!
The heavens are not too high, His praise may thither fly,
The earth is not too low, His praises there may grow,
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and king!

Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and king!
The church with psalms must shout, no door can keep
them out;
But, above all, the heart must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and king!

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great
mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night,
for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all
evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the
mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

Bishop's Sermon

It's not fair! The scandalous grace of God
Sermon preached by Bishop Jo for 20th September 2020

Matt 20:1-16

Today's parable from Matt 20 speaks about work. About working in a vineyard, which is of course directly pertinent to certain corners of this diocese, especially near Dorking! Today I'm in Childworth...

And before I get carried away in the great outdoors I can hear my lovely brother breathe a metaphorical sigh of relief ... he's spent his professional life as an accountant in business. Finally this preacher is going to get practical and address some of the M to F concerns of discipleship, not airey-fairey theological things that barely touch the ground. Let's see.

Jesus knows about the working world, its pressure and its politics. The landowner goes out early and finds workers – migrant workers with no contracts, indeed! - for his vineyard and agrees with them a daily wage. Then he goes out on four further separate occasions – at 9, noon, 3 and 5. Each time he hires more workers from among the unemployed, but interestingly no wage is agreed on these last four occasions. At the end of the day the landowner gives the same wage to all the labourers, whatever time of day he hired them – even the ones who just worked an hour at the end of the day. The whole-day workers saunter up, expecting an improved deal – but they get the same as each of the other workers. And they're scandalised. Infuriated. All justice has been undermined. You can imagine the most faithful and conscientious of workers stomping off...

And here's the other side to the story. Scholars tell us the sum involved was a generous daily wage. No one's been short-changed. But the whole-day workers don't see it like that. What at the start of the day was a blessing – a good day's pay – has now become an insult, because it's extended to people who've worked a fraction of the time they've worked.

Let's be clear about what the parable is really telling us. God's grace is generous. God doesn't discriminate between those who've been faithful Christians for decades and those who've just landed. If we recognise that the 'day's wage' is a metaphor for salvation – for forgiveness and eternal life – then – perhaps? - we lose the sense of irrationality and injustice and it all makes sense. Forgiveness and eternal life are sacred things, beyond precious. To be given such things is mind-blowing and wondrous. We're all undeserving, we're all humbled, we're all thankful to be here. Here by God's gracious invitation, God's sheer goodness. It's mind-boggling.

Yet in our insecurity, rather than cherish these things and focus on God our Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, we look around. We start comparing ourselves to others. What a waste of time, said the horse to the boy in a lovely ink drawing by Charlie Mackesy that a friend recently shared. But it's worse than that, it's more than just wasting time, it's fanning the flames of envy.

We look askance to our neighbours, and immediately feel that all that we have is not enough. So straightaway we demand more. Even though it's totally absurd to be asking for three helpings of forgiveness or four dollops of eternal life.

We make ourselves ridiculous for commodifying such things. One is all we could possibly need.

I wonder what touches you here? It's such a revealing episode. It shows how, within seconds of experiencing the grace of God, we are tempted to instrumentalise it, to repurpose for ourselves so that it conveniently serves our own petty purposes. In our own insecurity, we're tempted to try to turn it into a way in which it can better us, by which I mean, better us in relative terms: make us to be better than our peers. We assume there's a zero-sum game, so that if so-and-so gets more, that means what I have is lessened.

Rather than enjoy it for the limitless joy it gives us, we turn it into a weapon to wield in a perpetual game of one-upmanship. A game that is destined to lead to frustration, either denigrating our neighbours or denigrating ourselves, because it's unwinnable

The parable shows how envy can destroy us, by distracting us from the fabulous things we have, and captivating us with the constant temptation of comparison, turning abundance to scarcity, and leaving us feeling anything but fortunate, and cherished, but rather hard done-by. For myself I can hear the echo of the cry I used to utter as the youngest child in a family of three children, constantly suspicious that my older brothers got the better deal: 'It's not fair!'

So we've explored what the parable reveals. Now, what are we going to do about it? How do we grow in thankfulness for all we are given, and resist the temptation to compare ourselves to others – with our A levels, a uni place, that job opportunity, our colleague's new home, a neighbour's holiday, someone else's newfound love.

We could deal with all that by putting blinkers on. A sort of mind-your-own-business NIMBYism taken to extreme. Refusing to notice the other workers in the vineyard, let alone talking to them about their work (and what time they started, and how much they're being paid). Perhaps it's a good thing that asking someone's salary is a no-no in our culture? Others of us might deal with it by working longer, working harder, showing up even at the weekend, utterly determined by our diligence or resilience to outlast others, because if I grit my teeth and sweat it out the landowner will surely realise and recognise my added worth in the end.

But the gospel challenges these responses head-on. There is nothing in the gospels to promote either approach. Think of the early church in Acts, fostering values of greater sharing, the pooling of possessions, cell groups where there's extreme transparency and trust. And an inclusive equality in terms of slaves being welcomed on a par with slave-owners. The body of Christ is about radical community, new-found willingness to stop comparison, to set aside all the varying markers of class and race and money- and to come together around the table of Christ in a new depth of togetherness.

The gospel also challenges our assumptions that we can work our own salvation – that we can earn God's forgiveness, that we can justify ourselves by the quality of our lives or the extent of our work. It's no good. We are only ever justified by the generosity of God, the scandalous injustice by which God's grace is distributed. To everyone who turns up in the vineyard, whatever time they show.

There is a solution, but I'm sorry, it's harder work because it's very different work to all of that. The only solution is to address our human propensity to envy and find healing from it. To recognise God's abundance and name our own scarcity. The whole-day labourers are given forgiveness and eternal life but it's no good to them – they don't see it, they can't embrace it, it's wasted on them! - because they haven't named the corrosive and destructive power of envy. Being healed of envy is more vital to their security and well-being than any amount of earthly reward.

And so I'm bound to turn from the world of work back to something more airey-fairey but ultimately more real, more important, more enduring.

In heaven there isn't any work. There isn't anything to fix, heal, or complete. So our strategy of using work to build an unassailable citadel of security, competence or righteousness will fail. And so will our tactic of looking either side and checking we're ahead of everyone else, morally, financially, or psychologically. The work that really matters is the work the Holy Spirit does to conform us to the image of God in Christ. Joy in life lies simply in not impeding that work. For then, when finally we receive forgiveness and eternal life, we won't be evaluating whether that was our just reward or comparing ourselves to those around us. Instead, we'll realise we've already been enjoying them for a long time.
