

Reflections for 20th September 2020

15th Sunday after Trinity

It's not fair

There is a set of two cartoons that I've seen online several times, that show three people trying to look over a fence to see a sports game. In the first cartoon, they each have a box to stand on – the first, who is very tall, can see easily; the second can just see over the fence; and the third, who is much shorter, can't see over the fence at all. Is that fair? They have all been treated in the same way. In the second cartoon – the first person doesn't have a box to stand on, but can still just see over the fence; the second has a box and can just see over; and the third is standing on two boxes and can just see over as well. Is that fair? The boxes are not shared out evenly, but now they can all see the game.

In our gospel reading, Jesus told a story about workers in a vineyard, in which the owner went out four times during the day to hire more workers. The last workers he hired had only worked for an hour, yet they were given the normal pay for a full day. The workers who had been there all day expected to get a lot more, but they got the same, so they said, 'It's not fair!' So what is fair? To give more to those who had the opportunity to work for longer, and not enough to the others, or to give all of them enough to feed themselves and their families that evening?

In the Old Testament reading, Jonah was called to preach to the people of Nineveh, but he didn't want to go. He was worried that they listen and change their ways, and be forgiven. He didn't think that was fair, but God thought differently. In Luke's gospel, Mary the mother of Jesus praised God for bringing down rulers and lifting up the humble, and for filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty (Luke 1. 52-53). And Luke tells us that when Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, he read from the book of Isaiah and declared that God had sent him to proclaim good news to the poor, for those in need (Luke 4. 18).

So what is fair? The story Jesus told about the workers in the vineyard shows us something important about the 'kingdom of God', and reminds us about God's challenging vision of what is fair and just.

Revd John Waller

God our Father, we thank you for all your good gifts
that we can enjoy and share together:
help us to learn the way of your kingdom,
and what is fair for all people,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bible readings: Jonah 3: 10 - 4: 11; Philippians 1: 21-30; Matthew 20: 1-16

Story: 'Jonah the Groaner' (based on the book of Jonah from the Old Testament)