

"God's Economics"

Sunday 20th September 2020

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This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use as you are unable to attend church. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Welcome: The Lighting of a Candle & Call to Worship

Alpha and Omega, Beginning and end
of all things, Creator,
Sustainer, Provider,
In your name we gather, at your feet
we bow. Shield and defender,
Tower of refuge for the weary,
Deliverer, Redeemer,
Forgiver, in your name we worship,
At your feet we bow. **Amen**

StF 123 Come you thankful people come!

1. Come, you thankful people, come
Raise the song of harvest home
All is safely gathered in
Ere the winter storms begin
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied
Come to God's own temple, come
Raise the song of harvest home

2. All the world is God's own field
Fruit as praise to God we yield
Wheat and tares together sown
Are to joy or sorrow grown
First the blade and then the ear
Then the full corn shall appear
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may
be.

3. For the Lord our God shall come
And shall take the harvest home
From the field shall in that day
All offences purge away
Giving angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast
But the fruitful ears to store
In the garner evermore

4. Even so, Lord, quickly come
Bring thy final harvest home
Gather thou thy people in
Free from sorrow, free from sin
There, forever purified
In thy presence to abide
Come, with all Thine angels, come
Raise the glorious harvest home.

Henry Alford (1810 - 1871)

Our Opening Prayers:

Light of light, Lord of Lords, God of this
world and the next, We give you thanks
for the promise of this day, We give you
thanks for the challenge of this day,
We give you thanks for the blessings of
this day. Light of light, Lord of Lords,
God of this world and the next, We give
you thanks You spoke And a universe
Burst into existence. You breathed And
an ocean Broke
against shore.
You laughed
And a wild goose
Flew across the horizon.



You sang And a love song Was played for the world. You are the God who formed us, The God who knows us, The God who loves us, The God who leads us, The God who feeds us, The God who blesses us. The beginning and end of all that we are, and hope to be. Worthy of our praise. Creator God, we glimpse your beauty in setting sun, mountain top, eagle's wing. We sense your power in thunder crash, lightning flash and ocean's roar.

Creator God we praise you
Precious Jesus, we see your love stretched out upon a cruel cross.
We stand in awe at your sacrifice, pure love poured out for humankind.
Precious Jesus we praise you
Holy Spirit, we see your power in lives transformed, hearts on fire.
We listen for your still, small voice, comforting, guiding, calling.
Holy Spirit we praise you. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Today's Reading:

Matthew 20:1-16 *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard*

20 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. **2** He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. **3** "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. **4** He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' **5** So they went. "He

went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. **6** About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

7 "Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

9 "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. **10** So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. **12** 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' **13** "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?

14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. **15** Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Time to Reflect:

Joshua DuBois once said this: "When we realize that it is God's pure grace that binds the bodies and minds of our fellow humans together, each person we encounter becomes more holy, special, worthy of care. Through this lens, it's harder to judge. And easier to love."

In our Gospel passage this morning, Jesus is telling a parable, about the kingdom of heaven, that uses imagery of landowners and harvesters and vineyards. We read that a landowner goes out in the morning to hire labourers for the vineyard. He offers them the usual daily wage for a day. He goes out again at noon and at 3pm and at 5pm, and hires more and more labourers. At the end of the day, the landowner pays them all a day's wage. All of them.

That means that the labourers who have worked 10 hours, 8 hours, 5 hours, and 1 hour all get the same amount of money regardless of how long or how short they have worked. Naturally, this upsets some of the labourers. The ones who worked all day were suddenly less happy with the wage they had received, because those who worked only one hour, also received the same amount. This parable is a difficult one to hear and to accept and perhaps you can sympathise with the labourers hired to work in this man's vineyard.

If we are honest with ourselves, we think the labourers have a valid point. Some of those men had worked for 10 hours, in the heat of the sun. Others

had only worked 1 hour and they received the same pay as those who had



been there for the last 10 hours. It just doesn't seem fair, just, equitable,

or even rational, does it?. Jesus uses this parable to open the eyes of the disciples to one of the most difficult characteristics of God for anyone to accept - the characteristic of grace.

God's economics are not our economics.

God's grace may even offend others. But, God's grace is for everyone and freely given to all humankind, in equal proportion. The labourers complaint is not simply economic, but that "you have made them equal to us.", in verse 11. Jesus is addressing this parable to the Jews of the day and is trying to explain how the kingdom of heaven works.

As we know, the Jews were historically understood to be the "Chosen People." and Jesus was using the parable to highlight the attitude of the Jews, who felt they deserved more than others based on their association with God. We can surmise that the labourers who had been working from early morning with the Jews and the others who worked later on in the day were the Gentile converts. to Judaism and the vineyard is Israel and the owner of the vineyard is God.

The Parable was Jesus' way of explaining to them that their relationship with God didn't work the way they thought it did. To them it was all about earning and

deserving. With God it is about His generosity and giving. They were thinking "works", and Jesus was speaking about "Grace." Jesus teaches his disciples, and us, about God's generosity that we so easily overlook, because we view our situation through self-protective eyes, and from the viewpoint of what we don't have. The disciples were looking for a special reward because they were the first disciples, and because they had given up so much to follow Jesus. But Jesus shows how the disciples are too worried about themselves to realize the generous gifts that God has given them. When the landowner hires the labourers, he tells them literally "whatever is right, I will give you." And in God's world, there is abundance for all the labourers, both the first and the last.

The disciples, like the first labourers, only saw their own scarcity. Let's be honest we like things to be fair. We care about equality and equity. We know it isn't right for people to get the same pay for such drastically different amounts of work. Who would agree to such a thing? Do we feel the same sense of outrage if we remember that this parable is about the Kingdom of God and about grace?

If we interpret this story correctly and the landowner is God, then we are the ones asked to come and work in God's vineyard, to be workers in the harvesting. Being a worker in God's vineyard is having a relationship with God, being a member of the Kingdom of God. God is giving out invitations to come and work in the vineyard and everyone is invited.

I read a story of a woman who went to her Priest seeking advice about her very difficult life. "Oh, Father," she said, "I am so unhappy! My life is a tragic mess! I simply can't handle the children and my husband and my work and our home! How can I go on with life?" The Priest asked "Do you have a rooster?" "Well, yes, we have a rooster." The woman replied. "Bring the rooster in the house and come back to me in a week" said the Priest.



The next week the woman returned and said "Father, life is much worse than before! The dogs chase the rooster and the rooster gets feathers everywhere and crows in the night and we can't talk or get any sleep and—" "Do you have a goat?" said the Priest. "Well—yes, yes, we do have a goat," said the woman. "Bring the goat into the house," said the Priest, "and come back to me in a week."

The next week, the woman returned and said "Oh Father, life is even worse than before! The goat and the rooster are fighting, and the goat is getting into our food, and everyone is angry and—" "Do you have a horse?" the Priest asked. "Y—es, we have a horse, but—" "Bring the horse into the house and come back to me in a week".

The woman returned in a week and said "Father! Life is much worse than before! There is no place to sit in the house, the noise is deafening, and the smell is horrible and—" The Priest interrupted the woman and said "Take the horse, and the goat and the rooster out of the house, and come back to me in a week."

The next week the woman returned and said "Oh Father! Life is so much better than before! The house is quiet and the smell is gone and the family can talk and eat together in peace, how can I ever thank you!"

Sometimes we need to see differently before we understand. Sometimes we have expectations and they limit our understanding about God, about others and who is worthy and who is not, who is deserving and who is not, what is fair and what is not and sometimes we even misunderstand what God's grace is all about.

If you've been a Christian all your life and tried to live as Jesus asks you to live, but the person sitting next to you in Church has only been a Christian for a year or two, do you think they should still be offered God's grace and love?



How far does your generosity extend? How did we become like the labourers in the vineyard? Do

we expect everything to be fair even when it comes to God's unconditional love? Do we really wish that we had a say in how God spends God's grace? Jesus is teaching us that salvation is not a reward system so that those who've worked longer and harder at it might receive more but that it's a free gift given by God who shows mercy and love to all people. Verse 16 says this: ***the last will be first, and the first will be last.*** It means, each person receives the same. Jesus, talks about how we offer God's love and grace to

others in how we feed and clothe and otherwise look after and care for the least of those among us.

It is how we view, see and love others that defines us and how we offer the gift of grace to others. As it is given to us we must be willing to pass that grace on to others. We must be able to humble ourselves, to be at the service, of and for, others. So salvation isn't a reward based on either a person's merit or their work, which the labourers expected, but a wonderful gift based upon God's grace and generosity.

The Gospel is for us, but it is not about us. Our salvation is God's gift to us, but it is about his love, and about the grace of God, freely given to all who believe. We are each receiving what we did not earn and do not deserve, because God is generous and God is gracious.

Experiencing God's grace transforms who we are and the way we see our lives. God calls us to view the world differently, through the eyes of God's abundance. God's generosity does not deny our limitations, but rather, affirms God's possibilities. Looking through the eyes of God's abundance, we can see the blessings that God has given us. As Christians, we can see abundance in sacrifice, freedom in following God, hope in repentance, security in forgiveness and grace that is always there even when we feel unworthy and unloved.

We have discovered real gifts of support and friendship and wholeness during this difficult period. We have extended grace to others by our actions, our words and our service to others in how

we handled the pandemic. We were not limited by it, we were empowered by it to be the hands, the feet, the voice and the face of Jesus to others. We offered love and grace to those in need.

We were challenged to exercise our ministry in new and profound ways and we testified to our faith by the way we treated our sisters and brothers, not just within our Churches but within this Island.

We have tasted something of God's abundance, and by God's grace we can live the days ahead in response to that abundance and in joy of God's possibilities because out of change, out of hope, out of love and out of grace, we are still being held and still loved unconditionally by a God who walks



with us even in the unknown landscape of life like we are experiencing right now. God simply says, accept my gift of grace, be transformed by it and then reach out in an authentic spirit of servant-hood and discipleship and share that grace with others so they may be transformed too. Only in a ministry of loving service, can we discover the secret face of Jesus Christ, and the true meaning of God's grace. Amen.

Here I am wholly available

Here I am, wholly available
As for me, I will serve the Lord
Here I am, wholly available
As for me, I will serve the Lord

The fields are white unto harvest
But O, the labourers are so few
So Lord, I give myself to help the reaping
To gather precious souls unto You

The time is right in the nation
For works of power and authority
God's looking for a people who are willing
To be counted in His glorious victory

As salt are we ready to savour?
In darkness are we ready to be light?
God's seeking out a very special people
To manifest His truth and His might
Composer: *Chris Bowater*

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Prayers of Intercession

Lord God you are the father of all people and we come before you today with our prayers knowing that you will hear us, help us and guide us.

We pray today for reconciliation and forgiveness in our own lives. Peace will begin with us and we ask that the change we all so long for in the world would be present in our own lives and be an example to others.

Lord we ask you to help us to seek out opportunities to work for understanding and tolerance between people of different religious backgrounds, different social backgrounds, different

racial and political backgrounds. We pray especially that religious views would not lead to bitterness and hatred between us your children whom you so love and with whom your patience and tolerance is boundless.

Lord today we pray for victims of fire, flood earthquake, famine or disease. For those whom disaster has left homeless, injured or bereaved and today our thoughts and prayers are especially with those people.

We pray for people who are frightened because they are ill. Reassure them that because of the knowledge that you give to us, many diseases can now be cured. Give them courage, hope and peace, and the knowledge that you are present in their weakness, pain and suffering. We pray especially for those who have no one to help them, that in their loneliness they may know that you are with them.

Lord in your mercy,
We pray for those whose hearts have been saddened by the death of someone close and dear to them, for members of our families who have died and whose anniversary we recall. Help us to experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit within us, and the fellowship of the church family around us until we are reunited once more in your heavenly kingdom. Amen.

StF 663 I the Lord of Sea and Sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them,
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them,
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

Words: from Isaiah 6; Daniel L Schutte (b 1947)

Music: Daniel L Schutte (b 1947)

A Sending Out Prayer & Blessing

May the power and the presence of God go with you. May the Call of Jesus lead you into fruitful labour; and may the Holy Spirit fill you with the joy of grace.

May the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. Amen.

Join us for a post service Coffee & Chat,
on the phone by dialing
02203 481 5240

Meeting ID: **878 0011 0669 #**

Participants ID: #

Password: **336542**

