



SUNDAY 4 OCTOBER – THE 17TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION

COLLECT

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself,
and so bring us at last to your heavenly city
where we shall see you face to face;
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.
Amen.

Psalm 19

- 1 The heavens are telling the glory of God ♦
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
- 2 One day pours out its song to another ♦
and one night unfolds knowledge to another.
- 3 They have neither speech nor language ♦
and their voices are not heard,
- 4 Yet their sound has gone out into all lands ♦
and their words to the ends of the world.
- 5 In them has he set a tabernacle for the sun, ♦
that comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber
and rejoices as a champion to run his course.
- 6 It goes forth from the end of the heavens
and runs to the very end again, ♦
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.
- 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; ♦
the testimony of the Lord is sure
and gives wisdom to the simple.
- 8 The statutes of the Lord are right and rejoice the heart; ♦
the commandment of the Lord is pure
and gives light to the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever; ♦
the judgements of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold,
more than much fine gold, ♦

sweeter also than honey,
dripping from the honeycomb.

11 By them also is your servant taught ◆
and in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can tell how often they offend? ◆
O cleanse me from my secret faults!

13 Keep your servant also from presumptuous sins
lest they get dominion over me; ◆
so shall I be undefiled,
and innocent of great offence.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight, ◆
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

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Philippians 3.4b-14

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 21.33-46

33 "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34 When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35 But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' 39 So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who

will give him the produce at the harvest time." 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"? 43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. 44 The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. 46 They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection – this week from Hannah

Well, I'll say it straight away- I don't like the parable in today's Gospel reading! Most of the characters are nasty, and I'm never a fan of a violent story. But perhaps that's the point. We can be tempted to try and bend parables into allegories, where there is a one-to-one mapping of each element onto something in everyday life- a bit like in those old assembly favourites- Aesop's Fables. Parables though, are much more mysterious and un-steadying than that!

When Jesus talked in parables his point was to challenge and disrupt assumptions- not necessarily to clarify them, but more to prompt us to notice where our (limited) human principles and God's principles diverge. There are at least two places in this parable where the story seems a bit nonsensical- perhaps that's where we can learn something precious about the unfolding, glorious work of God?

The first strange thing is that the vineyard owner keeps sending his servants, and eventually his son, to be beaten and killed by the wretched tenants. Why does he keep using the same failed strategy? You'd think he'd learn after the first couple of times! But in the landowner's persistence, we learn something of the faithfulness of God- God who, despite the fickleness and dishonesty of God's people, continues to approach us with patience- patience that far outweighs our own. Justice comes in the end, but God works with us- inviting us to usher it in as co-workers in the Kingdom.

Another strange thing is that the tenants don't own the vineyard, yet behave as though they do. They have no respect for the landowner whatsoever. On one level, this was a direct attack on the religious power-holders in Jesus' time- those officials who were policing the boundaries of Jewish practice and did not like what they saw in the ragtag wandering preacher from Galilee. But it's also a reminder of the eternal truth that nothing is actually ours. We have been entrusted with God's story and God's creation- as priests and custodians to both. This parable is a reminder to notice that and, this harvest time, to remember that our vocation is to the whole of creation. We share our story in both words and actions. As God is faithful to us, let's be renewed in our commitment to look to the whole of our lives as a faithful commendation of the good news that we believe. We, along with all things, are held in love by our Creator, who is merciful and just- may that be the message of our daily actions and decisions.

I'm reminded of some words from the prophet Micah- so simple and understated, yet huge in their implications- perhaps they can be our prayer as we ponder our Gospel reading today:

*Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.
Micah: 6-8*