

Barthol Chapel and Tarves Sunday 20 September 2020

Worship Materials



Image: Day labourers in Doha, Qatar waiting for work

“So the last will be first and the first will be last”(Matt 20:16)

Introduction

This is the second in our series of services built around the parables of Jesus as we think about how these stories might challenge us to see and live differently.

Praise CH4 182 Now thank we all our God

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| <p>1. Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices
Who wondrous things has done
In whom his world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love
That still is ours today.</p> | <p>And keep us in his grace
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.</p> |
| <p>2. O, may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us.</p> | <p>3. All praise and thanks to God
Who reigns in highest heaven –
The Father and the Son
And Spirit- now be given:
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now
And shall be evermore.</p> |

The Word of God: St Matthew 20:1-16

*20*For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. *2*After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. *3*When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; *4*and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. *5*When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. *6*And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" *7*They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." *8*When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the

labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.”⁹When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner,¹²saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”¹³But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

Reflection

Who works the hardest? A top television presenter earning over £1 million a year or a care worker in a Nursing Home struggling to earn the Living Wage? Who deserves the most in wages? The footballing idol, entertaining millions of people across the world, or the nurse working 12 hour shifts in intensive care? These are big questions. And they have been highlighted once again during the current pandemic. And perhaps to some extent the parable that Jesus tells in today’s bible reading addresses this problem, even if it doesn’t give us the answers that we might want to hear.

“The kingdom of heaven”, says Jesus “is like a landowner”. This landowner goes out early in the day – down to the market place where the casual labourers wait to be hired for work. He selects some and agrees to pay them at the usual daily rate to work in his vineyard. Later in the day he goes back and chooses some more workers and puts them to work in the vineyard. He does this at regular intervals throughout the day. The last lot of workers are chosen when there is only one hour of daylight left. As dusk falls payment time arrives. The workers who were chosen last find themselves paid first and they are given a full day’s wage for an hour’s work. Those who started work early in the morning see the latecomers being paid a full day’s wage and no doubt this raises their expectations of a bonus. As you can imagine, they are not happy when they are paid the same amount for a whole day’s work, even although that was the agreement reached when they were taken on.

They begin to grumble. The landowner replies that he has not done anything wrong – he’s given the first workers their due – why should he not be generous towards those who came along later to work. Perhaps the first workers are envious because the landlord is generous?

This parable draws us in. We can picture the scene. Perhaps we remember standing in the school playground while teams were picked for football or netball or any other team game? You could predict the order in which people would be picked. And if you were anything like me – not very quick on your feet and terrible hand-eye coordination then you will know how humiliating it was as you were always at the back of the queue! Left out! Undervalued! How much worse for those whose next meal depends on them being selected.

But for those who were picked first for the teams no doubt it seemed a fair way to do things – surely it is right to be rewarded for your ability or efforts. But what if those who were picked first were then made to sit on the substitute benches for most of the game and

not allowed to play? Or try adding financial reward into the equation and things become even more complicated.

Ultimately Jesus parable, for all that we may be able to relate to it in one way or another, is not one that sits comfortably with us. Because it offends against our sense of justice and fairness. We might agree that the landowner can run his business as he likes but we don't approve of his payroll policies. Yes, the landowner has a right to be generous but if he wants to be generous why not pay all the workers a bonus? – surely that would be fairer. And so we take our place with those who are hired first, paid last and now complain. We are envious. If the owner is going to be generous why is he not being generous to us? This story of Jesus challenges our limited understanding of the generosity of God.

Some of the questions Jesus story raises are explored in the play *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer which asks what it means to be “beloved by God”. “Beloved by God is of course the English translation of *Amadeus*. The play is highly fictionalised and it centres on a dramatic confrontation between two musical composers, Antonio Salieri and his nemesis Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Salieri is portrayed as a righteous hard-working man. From his youth he wanted to write music. As a teenager he made a bargain with God. He would write God glorious music and God would grant him fame and fortune in return. When we meet Salieri in the play he is a successful and admired composer. All Vienna sings Salieri's praise – and his music! The bargain he made with God has it seems been accepted.

Enter Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a child prodigy, who wrote his first symphony at the age of 5. Mozart is portrayed in the play as vulgar, a notorious womaniser, tactless, conceited, irreligious, disrespectful, *and hugely talented*. Salieri has to work hard to write beautiful music but Mozart dose not - music flows from Mozart effortlessly. Salieri recognises Mozart's genius and that his music proceeds directly from God, that Mozart is Amadeus, “beloved of God”. Salieri has received all the praise and reward he bargained for but Mozart has talents beyond negotiation!

“Are you envious, because I am generous?” asks the owner of the vineyard. Of course we are. We want some of that generosity for ourselves. But as we stand complaining at the back of the line, perhaps there is something more to see. And that something is that the problem is not with the owner's generosity but with the way we see and understand things – where we might be tempted to value people in terms of ability or economic worth, God does not.

This parable speaks of a God who shows no favours when it comes to the giving out of grace. Those who first heard this story would have known that the casual labourers who were hired first would be the ones who were known to the landowner, the ones who are strong and healthy. They are blessed with the ability to do a full day's work. Those who would be left to the end of the day may have been those with a bad reputation or those who were physically unable for the work, the ones who need a bit of extra care. And so this parable reminds us that God's love is not dependent on our ability or economic worth. God's mercy is freely given to the first and the last in the queue. All of us are beloved of God, the first and the last, Salieri and Mozart, those at the front and those at the back of the line.

And once we recognise that, then perhaps we too will be able to follow the landowner's example of generosity. Surely we who have received so much can learn to be generous and accept our responsibility to give a bit of extra care to those who need it most of all.

Pointers for Prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- Those who have lost a loved one for other reasons during the pandemic
- All key workers, those adjusting to working from home and those who are returning to their workplace
- The governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and their advisers as the virus threatens to peak again
- University staff and students as they prepare to begin
- Businesses struggling and all who are facing redundancy and financial hardship
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the restrictions
- Local congregations as they take difficult decisions on whether to re-open for worship and how best to implement health and safety measures

You may like to end your prayers by saying the Lord's prayer.

Praise CH4 685 vs 1,2,3,5 For everyone born

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| <p>1. For everyone born, a place at the table
For everyone born, clean water and bread,
A shelter a space, a safe place for growing,
For everyone born a star overhead.
<i>And God will delight
When we are creators of justice and joy
Yes, God will delight
When we are creators of justice,
Justice and joy!</i></p> | <p>With wisdom and grace dividing the power
For woman and man, a system that's fair.</p> |
| <p>2. For woman and man, a place at the table
Revising the roles, deciding the share</p> | <p>3. For young and for old, a place at the table
A voice to be heard, a part in the song
The hands of a child, in hands kind and wrinkled.
For young and for old, the right to belong.</p> |
| | <p>4. For everyone born, a place at the table,
To live without fear, and simply to be
To work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
For everyone born, the right to be free.</p> |

Notices

Next Sunday 9.45am Joint Worship (Service commences 10.00am)

If you would like to be added to the e-mail list for the link to Sunday's live worship gathering on zoom or join in on your landline please contact:

Rob e-mail sessionclerk@bartholchapel.org or Susanna Tel 851345 or e-mail smbichard@aol.com.

Tuesday 22 September 7.00pm Tarves Session Meeting on Zoom – link to follow.

Tuesday 29 September 7.00pm Meeting of Trustees, Board and Session on Zoom – link to follow.

Community Bible Experience – Books and reading plans are available and can be collected from the Manse vestibule. £5 towards the cost of these may be left in the envelope provided. First meeting Thursday 1 October 4.00pm when we will be discussing Jonah, Amos, Hosea and Micah.

Care in the Community if you are aware of anyone in Tarves who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887. If you are aware of anyone in Barthol Chapel please contact James Hepburn 806611.

Pastoral Care If you would like to speak to the minister please contact Alison 851295.

Sunday 4 October ‘Harvest at Home’

How can we celebrate ‘**H-A-R-V-E-S-T**’ this year? Here are some suggestions

- **H-A-V-E** a meal using local produce only
- Open your **H-E-A-R-T-S** by making contact with someone on their own
- **S-H-A-R-E** with others by making a donation of food or money - instead of taking produce to church use the local collection points at Duthie’s and the Pharmacy. Or give to a charity like Mary’s Meals whose vision is that every child receives one daily meal in their place of education and that all those who have more than they need, share with those who lack even the most basic things. Donate by Tel:01838 200605 or 0800 698 1212 Or online www.marysmeals.org.uk

And of course **GIVE THANKS**- join our on-line Harvest Thanksgiving at 10.00am on Zoom (link available from Susanna 851345). This will have a rainbow theme – please wear or bring with you an object representing one colour of the rainbow.

