



Week 2 – Dignity not Charity

SETTING:

Before the group arrives prepare the room, with seats in the round and a central table. Soft lighting helps and have elements ready to use. Place two large plates on the table in the middle of the room. On one put a large bunch of red grapes, the other should be empty. Light the candle and arrange the other items for the Thank you and Goodnight. You will also need print offs of the 'Blob Picture', which you can find among the online resources.

As the group arrives play some music to go with the theme. For example: R.E.S.P.E.C.T (Aretha Franklin) or Dignity (Deacon Blue). Feel free to choose other music that you think would fit the theme or set the right atmosphere.

WORSHIP AND WELCOME (See Introductory notes):

Begin with these opening words followed by a moment of silence.

Jesus said "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so pray to the Lord of the harvest..."
Matthew 9:37

**All: God of the harvest, we have heard your call and we have come.
 We are in awe of your everlasting love.
 We are humbled by your belief in us.
 We are sorry for reluctance and our apathy.
 We are ready to toil together in your vineyard, and to unveil your Kingdom on earth...
 That the last may be first and all may share in your feast of life.**

Silence

Pass round the plate of grape and invite people to take some and enjoy them as people open their Windows on the Week and share those things for which they are thankful (gestures of kindness, gratitude for health, a moment of beauty). Allow a moment of quiet after each to allow the group to reflect. After those that wish to have shared have a time of silence or open prayer followed by:

Leader: Almighty God,
 you have created the heavens and the earth
 and made us in your own image:
 teach us to discern your hand in all your works
 and your likeness in all your children;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,
 now and for ever.

OR The Lord's Prayer.

Welcome everyone and thank them for coming.

OPEN QUESTION:

Ask the group to share with the people next to them the answer to this question:

What are you here for? This is intended to engage people at a surface level and help them feel more comfortable. When they have had some time to do this ask them to think on a deeper level:

What are you here for? These can be shared openly, but use your discretion.

WORD PLAY:

Read the parable from The Message version of the Bible (Matthew 20:1-16). This can be read by you or by someone else in the group. If time allows ask 3 different people to each read the whole parable through and note the different emphases each reader includes.

Pass round the 'Blob Pictures' for the parable and invite people to look at them in quietness. Ask everyone to try to identify themselves in the picture, and explain why. This can be fun but please be aware that some responses might be quite emotional. Allow people to share freely if there is time and the group feel comfortable together.

CONVERSATION:

(Explain) This whole parable turns on people's relationship with the master of the vineyard. A scenario well known to Jesus' first followers, and one still prevalent in our world today. The master owns the land, the crops are his; he has paid staff, but in order to harvest the grapes before the bad weather comes in September he needs more help.

(Ask) Who are our co-workers? Who is excluded? What is the crop we are reaping today?

(Explain) The parable makes it clear that we are not the Master, but all are called to be co-workers and to reap the harvest, all are equal. The first are last and the last first.

(Ask) How, in your experience, does the world respond to this story and its clarion call for equality?

(Explain) The Master could have responded to the crowds of unwaged and desperate by giving them hand-outs from his (obviously) considerable wealth. Instead he discerned their deeper need for recognition, purpose and dignity.

(Ask) What does this have to say about the projects and charities we support, or the refugee crisis in Europe?

(Explain) The Master called them to do a respectable job with the others, to become part of a team. His team. To achieve something urgent and important together. Perhaps to gain skills.

(Ask) How does this Kingdom model differ from the way the world is run today?

(Activity) Invite people to divide into 3 smaller groups and allocate one of these readings to each group. Ask them to discuss what their reading has in common with the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Responding to a call, humility, unconditional love...).

1. **Exodus 4. 1-5** Moses gives to God his staff – symbol of his life and living - and a miracle happens.
2. **Matthew 26. 6-13** Jesus' feet are anointed in a breath taking, reckless gesture of love and gratitude.

3. **Mark 7. 24-30** Jesus gently tests the Syro-phoenician woman's resolve and she responds in true Greek fashion with clever repartee. But healing had already commenced as Jesus found himself in a foreign region, speaking to a foreign woman, overcoming all the taboos of tradition, race, gender, religion, reputation and much more.

Call the groups back to share their thoughts and then ask them to identify any other themes that the readings have in common.

(Response) Invite people to look in their pockets, bags and about their person to find an everyday object that symbolises something for which they are grateful to God. This could be keys to their home – symbolising security and shelter, glasses – symbolising sight, a diary- symbolising community, business, freedom etc. –

THANK YOU and GOODNIGHT:

Invite people to place their symbols of their life and gratitude on the empty plate, saying why, if they wish.

Ask participants to reflect for a moment on what they've seen and heard and what they are thinking themselves, then invite them to take an item from the table which represents their engagement during the session, and to hold it as they share their thoughts:

A candle for illumination – light a tea light from the central candle and hold it – it symbolises something new we have seen

Salt for faith in action – a pinch of salt from the central bowl – it represents a way in which we have been inspired to make a response in our own lives.

A peg for questions – take a peg and hold it – this stands of the reflections and questions we may want to 'peg up' for a while.

Bread - tear a piece from the loaf and hold it – it is a sign of how we have been fed and nourished by God's Word.

As each person holds their item as we offer this prayer

Leader: *As we hold these ordinary things we remember that Jesus lived his life amongst the ordinary, and by his presence transformed it into the extra-ordinary.*

So may Christ the Bread of life continue to feed us with his word and example so that we may be full with the abundance of his generous Kingdom.

May Jesus who demands that we keep our saltiness inspire us to generous action so that we might better reflect his image in us.

May Christ, who is the light of the world, shine his light into our lives and contexts that we might see with his eyes and peer even into the darkest places.

May Jesus, who told stories without explanation and left questions hanging, help us to hold our doubts and queries as we continue to follow him.

And may Christ who shows us the very generous heart of God guide and sustain us until we meet again.

Allow everyone to replace their symbols on the table, except those holding bread. Pass piece of bread to everyone else in the group and in the silence prayerfully eat together.

Leader: Let us bless each other with the words of the grace:

**All: 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.**

Play some music as people say farewell and leave.