

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 20/09/20

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Opening affirmation from Psalm 145 ¹

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.
Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.
Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.
One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.
They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty –
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
They tell of the power of your awesome works – and I will proclaim your great deeds.
They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

Hymn STF 55

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| 1. Immortal, Invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious,
the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise. | 4. Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore Thee,
all veiling their sight;
All praise we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee. |
| 2. Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of
goodness and love. | 5. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious,
the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious,
Thy great name we praise. |
| 3. To all life Thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
Then wither and perish; but naught changeth Thee. | Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908) |

Prayer

Holy God, from whom all things come and to whom all honour is due, we offer you our praise. You are Creator and sustainer of all that is – the billions of galaxies in the universe and the trillions of cells in the human body – of the vastness and the minute.
You are the provider of material blessings in light and sunshine, air and water and food and drink.
You are the provider of emotional blessings in comfort and security, in delight and companionship and in love and relationship.
You are the provider of spiritual blessings in revelation and salvation, eternal life and hope and in Word and Spirit. We praise thank and adore you now and for ever. Amen

Aware of your holiness and generosity we admit the many ways in which we do not live holy or generous lives. We are selfish and heedless of the needs of others. Our hearts are far from pure and our lives are less than whole. Forgive us we pray.

Silence

Cleanse and renew us and grant us fresh inspiration and encouragement through the power of the Holy Spirit to follow the way of Christ. Amen

Reading – Matthew 20: 1-16 ¹

¹‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ²He 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 market-place doing nothing. ⁴He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” ⁵So they went.

‘He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶About 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. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When 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? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don’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.’

Reflection

Perhaps you have been in a situation where you were utterly dependent upon someone else’s decision; perhaps that moment of waiting in line at school to be chosen to join a group or a sports team or to play a part in the play; perhaps waiting for your job application to be assessed or for a phone call or Email after a job interview. Think how that felt. Were you full of anxiety, a sense of helplessness and dependence? Did the time drag? Those waiting in the market place to be hired by the local landowners in the parable which Jesus told knew something of this experience. These people were at the whim of the vineyard owner and much more than mere pride was at stake. They were the itinerant manual labouring class with no trade and no regular source of income. They had only the sweat of their brows and the strength of their arms to offer so they waited to hear the words ‘You also go and work in my vineyard’, the words which would mean food for the day, daily bread.

So this parable story, the story with a meaning, has something to say about being chosen, about being wanted and needed, included and valued. That in itself is a vital message. It may be what you need to hear today especially if you are feeling ‘laid aside’ by the social restrictions and not able to contribute and meet people as you used to do. You are chosen, included and valued eternally by the living God. God wants you in the team; there are good things he needs you to do.

But is there more? What about this landowner and his attitude – what are we to make of this? Well we may conclude he has not been to business school or got an MBA. If he had approached the dragon's den with this business model, the dragons would have breathed out fire and sent him packing. It defies all economic theory. This is not a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. No wonder there was discontent among the labours. Any right thinking labourer would next day decline the offer of work in the morning and wait until late afternoon, the 11th hour, to begin work and then expect the full day's pay for it. It is a recipe for labour unrest and is totally impractical.

So if this is clearly not a practical approach to running a farm or to hiring labourers what is it about? The clue to its meaning surely lies in the questions the landowner asks when challenged about his unjust pay policy. 'Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' Remember he did not defraud those first recruits; they were paid what he agreed at the start of the hire. It is about the values and principles of God's world, the world as God intends it to be – the world that God is working to bring about - the Kingdom of God. It is a place of generosity. God owes us nothing – He is no one's debtor – all that we have, our life, our health, our families, our wealth, all that we like to call our own has been given by God. They are pure gift. They cannot be earned. Generosity is a characteristic of God, hence His Kingdom, the realm where His rule and reign is seen, is characterised by generosity. In fact, as this and other parable stories of Jesus point out, it is an extravagant, abundant, one might even say profligate Kingdom. It is one that takes no account of self-interest; which gives without thought of reward or gain. This is one of the upside down, back to front, counter-cultural values of the Kingdom in which, contrary to what one might expect, the last are first and the first are last. In which nobodies become somebodies, outcasts and outsiders are welcome and the poor and little children are generously included. It is a small child that Jesus takes as the example of this Kingdom. In fact in the Kingdom we are all the least and the last because we are told to become like little children if we want to become part of the life of God. We have to give up our pride in our strength and ability and simply receive from God His generous gifts – gifts we cannot earn and do not deserve.

Above all, that is true of the gift of future life and hope, the gift of eternal meaning and purpose, the gift of forgiveness for all our failings, mistakes and sins. We do not deserve any of these from the all-powerful Creator God yet he chooses to provide them, to make them possible through and in the life of Jesus. It is His amazing grace, His generous undeserved merit and favour towards us. When we realise this, life, true life, begins; kingdom life. Because we are the recipients of God's abundant extravagant generosity we must be generous too; generous to our employees, our co-workers, our neighbours – generous with our gifts, our time, our kindness, our compassion and our lives. As Jesus also says, because we have freely been given we can freely give. Amen.

Song – SF 1702 ²

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear,
the hour I first believed!

*My chains are gone, I've been set free,
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me.
And like a flood His mercy reigns,
Unending love, amazing grace.*

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine.
But God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine.

Suggestions for your own prayers

Pray for

- For negotiations in Qatar that have brought representatives of the Afghan Government and the Taliban together around a table. For courage to change and to work for peace through reconciliation.
- For refugees around the world especially of the island of Lesbos where the Moria camp has been destroyed by fire.
- For those whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed by wildfires in Oregon and California.
- For the UK Government in its negotiations with the EU over future arrangements for trade while still dealing with many other vital challenges.
- For those known to you having operations and treatment this week; those in hospital or unwell.
- For ourselves - ask God for what you need today.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn – SF 2856 ³

I cast my mind to Calvary
Where Jesus bled and died for me.
I see His wounds, His hands, His feet;
My Saviour on that cursed tree.

His body bound and drenched in tears,
They laid Him down in Joseph's tomb.
The entrance sealed by heavy stone;
Messiah still and all alone.
*O praise the name of the Lord our God;
O praise His name forevermore.
For endless days we will sing Your praise;
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God.*

And then on the third at break of dawn,
The Son of heaven rose again.
O trampled death where is your sting?
The angels roar for Christ the King.
O praise the name of the Lord our God

He shall return in robes of white;
The blazing sun shall pierce the night.
And I will rise among the saints;
My gaze transfixed on Jesus' face.
O praise the name of the Lord our God;

Oh Lord, oh Lord our God!
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God!

Blessing

God of glory, strengthen us in our life together
that we may grow in love for you and for each other;
and the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon us, now and always. Amen.

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