

## **Sermon for Trinity 15. 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Phil Baker**

Today's Parable of the vineyard labourers is one that would have the unions up in arms and the workers striking if it happened in our world today. It was not the way a landowner would have behaved in Jesus's day either. It would definitely not have gone down well with the casual workers on the farm I used to run way back in the 1970s. The whole point of course is that the parable is a story that greatly exaggerates reality to get its point over to the listeners. Jesus gets their attention by saying something they do not expect to hear. It's unfair in anyone's eyes to pay the person who only works an hour at the end of the day the same as someone who has slaved away all day through the midday heat. Any farmer doing that would have a riot on his hands.

The wage referred to as the usual daily wage, in fact was one denarius in the currency of the time. That was the usual wage for hired labourers. It was a sort of minimum wage, probably sufficient for survival but little more. These were the lowest form of labour, casual labourers who went to the marketplace in the morning and were collected by farmers to work in the fields. Even slaves and servants had more status because they were attached to one family or person and had security of work and knew they would have somewhere to sleep and food in their bellies.

So what is Jesus trying to say here? He starts his story using those words with which he so often prefaced parables, 'The Kingdom of heaven is like...' The values of the world and the Kingdom of heaven are so very different. The businessman would pay each worker according to the work they had actually done, at so much an hour or so much a per basket of grapes picked. God pays differently. Every worker gets paid the same, regardless of work done. That is the nature of the kingdom; everyone who comes to God is equal. No one person can be in the kingdom more than another. You are either in it or out of it. It cannot be divided up and quantified. Such is God's love for us. It is unconditional and he loves us all equally. It's not something we earn by our good deeds. God's grace is free to us all; there for the taking if we just follow Jesus and live our lives for him. In God's eyes we are all equal, which is why any form of prejudice or discrimination is so at odds with the Christian way of life.

We live in a world of great inequality between rich and poor; an inequality that is growing and not shrinking. In the Kingdom of Heaven, fair means fairer than fair. Everybody receives the same regardless of how late they were to the table. We need to learn to love as God does, without conditions that exclude people, ready to accept all comers. Jesus's new commandment in John 13, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Jesus's love is unbounding and totally inclusive. His new commandment is that we must do the same. It's not always easy. St Paul writes to the Philippians, "live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ ...striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the Gospel...in no way intimidated by your opponents." The worldly do not understand the ways of the kingdom of heaven. This parable illustrates that so well. God's kingdom transcends anything the world can offer.

AMEN

