

The 15th Sunday after Trinity

A Collect for the 15th Sunday after Trinity:

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; 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**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew:

(Mt 20: 1-16)

‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 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?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” 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.” When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, “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.” But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

The Gospel of the Lord

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me; if you have understanding.” (job 38.4) So says the Lord God to Job, which despite its place in the middle of the Old Testament is almost certainly the oldest book present within it. And it demonstrates how different God’s comprehension of things is to that of everyday human experience. The parable of the landowner that Jesus tells in today’s Gospel passage is equally a lesson in higher divine thought and action. The complaint that, “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” on the face of it sounds a reasonable one. It seems unfair and illogical; unfair on those who worked longer, and illogical to pay out more for less hours worked. Ultimately, of course the ‘landowner’ is correct; that it’s up to him what he chooses to do with his money, if he wishes to be generous that’s his business and anyway nobody got less than they had agreed to. This feeling of unfairness in the face of generosity is echoed too in the parable of the prodigal son. Here the older son is angry with his father, saying; “For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” (Lk 15.29-30) The father’s reply in this case shows his intrinsic compassion as well as his generous provision; “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” (Lk 15.31-32) In both cases the aggrieved party feels that they have lost out or that the other should have had less, but in both parables Jesus alludes not simply to the earthly

concerns of work and fair pay or the right to inherited goods, rather he looks forward to the heavenly values of the kingdom to come. In this way, Matthew builds upon a theme we encountered last Sunday; God's forgiveness and limits upon it do not simply follow human understanding and expectation. Likewise, we cannot simply apply our limited human understanding to divine generosity either. Like divine forgiveness divine generosity works on a higher level and that should give us pause for thought. Elsewhere Matthew records Jesus caution: *"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged."* (Mt 7.1) It is God who gets to decide who is forgiven, and it is God who decides where to bestow his generosity. It gives us a pattern to follow and a practice to participate in - mercy, forgiveness, and generosity. These are truly values for a new kingdom, and from our viewpoint they can sometimes seem hard to comprehend and difficult to follow. This shouldn't come as a great surprise however, as God declares in Isaiah; *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Is 55:8-9) Through being the 'body of Christ' on earth we get to participate, however imperfectly at this point, in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. God invites us to live those higher ways and think those higher thoughts, to go beyond our 'snap' reactions or expectations. In doing so God prepares us to dwell with him in the kingdom to come with its higher divine values. In Jesus' parable, he shows us that God is also preparing us to accept that we will meet those who we might not expect to be there too. **Amen.**

May God bless you all.

A prayer for the eve of St Matthew's day:

Almighty God, whose blessed Son called
Matthew the tax collector to be an apostle and evangelist:
give us grace to forsake the selfish pursuit of gain
and the possessive love of riches
that we may follow in the way of your Son Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

CHRIST CHURCH, READING LATEST – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY:

Currently a limited pattern of communal worship will be available at Christ Church. Restrictions will remain in place and the service we can offer will be quite different to 'normal'. Hygiene and safety will be paramount to avoid potential for the transmission of Covid-19. Pew seating reductions and 2m social distancing will be the norm. Also, there will be no singing allowed, communion will be under one kind only, there will be no offertory or exchanging of the peace and service booklets will need to be taken home by each individual and brought back for use at following services. Sadly, there will be no facility to socialise in church after services. Please do observe all signage and instructions and listen for further information during the service. **FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES - AS OF AUGUST 8TH THE USE OF FACE-COVERINGS WHILE IN CHURCH WILL BE MANDATORY.** Please do not come up for communion if you cannot wear a mask

Due to 2m social distancing rules, numbers allowed into church at any one time will be limited so please do let us know if you intend to be at church for the 10am communion service on Sunday the 19th July:
Please email Fr. Peter: fr.peterday@virginmedia.com or leave a telephone message for him: 07702043857

Please note:

IF YOU, OR ANYONE YOU HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH, OR HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS OF 'COVID-19' PLEASE DO NOT ATTEND CHURCH. If you are currently in a vulnerable category, please consider your visit carefully and do not risk your health. Please also note, toilet facilities will be limited and will be on request only due to the need for regular cleaning.

Please watch out for communications regarding developments and please do share this information with those who may not have received it.

Wishing every blessing to you and yours - Fr. Peter