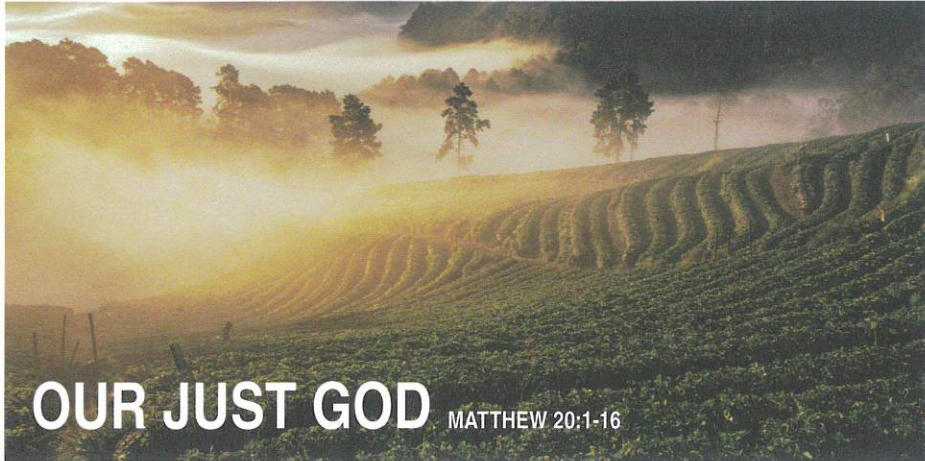


Sunday Message

25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year A • 24 September 2023 • Psalter Week 1



OUR JUST GOD MATTHEW 20:1-16

The parable of the Good Employer irritates some people. It seems unfair, even unjust, that the labourers who had worked since dawn were paid the same amount as those who had worked for only a few hours or less. We may identify with those workers who grumble about its unfairness. They had toiled in the boiling sun all day while the others did nothing.

But the employer isn't unfair. He has cheated nobody. He has paid them what they were entitled to and what they agreed - a just wage. Instead, the employer is compassionate. He pays the latecomers a full day's wages because he takes pity on them. He doesn't want them to go hungry. He doesn't want their loved ones to suffer. He wants them to be able to feed their families tomorrow. He knows he's unlikely to become a billionaire with a super yacht if he pays people a day's wages for an hour's work - but he does it anyway. His sense of justice demands it.

Today's Gospel tells us much about God and God's justice.

First, about God's justice. At the heart of the Old Testament is God's covenant with the people of Israel. God promised them that, if they stuck by him, he would never abandon them. God would always lavish his love on them, no matter how often or badly they let God down.

This covenant between God and God's people formed the template for how the people of Israel should live. They were to treat each other with justice because that was how God had treated them. They were to stand alongside the oppressed because God had stood alongside them when they were oppressed in Egypt. They were to care for the weakest in society, the widow and orphan, because God had cared for them in their distress. By being compassionate, they were simply mirroring God's compassion for them.

In the New Testament, Jesus epitomises God's justice. He stood alongside the poor. He identified with the most marginal. He said they would be first in the kingdom of heaven. Justice and compassion informed everything Jesus said and did, and it must be the same with us, he said.

Second, about good news. Today's Gospel declares it's never too late for us, for anyone. Salvation, redemption, is always available, even at the eleventh hour. The way the landowner acted towards his workers in the parable is the way God acts towards us. God is generous - more generous than any of us could ever be. God is just - more just than any of us could ever be. God is compassionate - more compassionate than we could ever be. It doesn't matter how long we've been serving him, or how recently we turned to him, or what our situation or history may be, God treats us generously and justly. Like the workers taken on at the eleventh hour, God wants all of us to be saved, no one to be excluded or forgotten. Whether we're stuck at the bottom of the economic ladder or trapped in a moral or spiritual haze, whatever the mess we're in, God's love envelops us completely. This is the good news we need in 2023. ■

PRAY

We are all aware of the appalling conditions in which children and vulnerable adults throughout the world are forced to work. Pray for them today, and pray for a more just world.

SAY

"Lord, help me to see and treat others the way you see and treat them. Amen."

REFLECT

Recently, I discovered a staggering statistic: The coronavirus pandemic has been very good for the super rich. The Institute for Policy Studies has calculated that in the first months of the pandemic the collective wealth of America's 643 billionaires increased from \$2.95 trillion to \$3.8 trillion. That works out to gains of \$4.7 billion a day - all during a time when the rest of the world was in economic turmoil.

A trillion is one billion million. An awful lot of noughts.

Of course, America isn't Europe. Still, worldwide, even before Covid-19, the pattern has been similar - wealth is being concentrated in fewer hands. A tiny number of people do very, very well out of the global economic order. The poor do not benefit at all. Soaring inflation has made life even more difficult for ordinary people and families.

Despite the remarkable progress humanity has made over the last century, economic inequality has grown - not lessened. Structural injustice has increased - not diminished. Billions struggle to survive, while oligarchs splash out on super yachts to flaunt how super rich they are.

This is a long way from God's vision for humanity, as revealed in the bible. It's a long way from Jesus's vision in today's Gospel.

The Book of Micah asks the question: "What does the Lord require of us?" And God's answer: "Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with God." Charity or philanthropy, no matter how generous, is no substitute for the work of justice. Pious prayers or easy words of consolation are no substitute for the work of justice. We must act towards others as God has acted towards us, even if it means we can never afford the price of a super yacht. ■

LEARN

God's justice is ruled by generosity and compassion.

All are equal in the eyes of God.

DO

If possible, try to ensure that the goods you buy are not the product of cheap or forced labour.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

I am the salvation of the people, says the Lord.
Should they cry to me in any distress,
I will hear them, and I will be their Lord for ever.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbour, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 55:6-9

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Seek the Lord while he is still to be found,
call to him while he is still near.
Let the wicked man abandon his way,
the evil man his thoughts.

Let him turn back to the Lord who will take pity on him,
to our God who is rich in forgiving;
for my thoughts are not your thoughts,
my ways not your ways – it is the Lord who speaks.

Yes, the heavens are as high above earth
as my ways are above your ways,
my thoughts above your thoughts.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 144

Response:

The Lord is close to all who call him.

- I will bless you day after day
and praise your name for ever.
The Lord is great, highly to be praised,
his greatness cannot be measured. (R.)
- The Lord is kind and full of compassion,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
How good is the Lord to all,
compassionate to all his creatures. (R.)

- The Lord is just in all his ways
and loving in all his deeds.
He is close to all who call him,
who call on him from their hearts. (R.)

SECOND READING

Philippians 1:20-24, 27

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians.

Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death. Life to me, of course, is Christ, but then death would bring me something more; but then again, if living in this body means doing work which is having good results – I do not know what I should choose. I am caught in this dilemma: I want to be gone and be with Christ, which would be very much the better, but for me to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need for your sake.

Avoid anything in your everyday lives that would be unworthy of the gospel of Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

Blessings on the King who comes,
in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven
and glory in the highest heavens!
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mathew 20:1-16

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard. Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, 'You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage.' So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' 'Because no one has hired us' they answered. He said to them, 'You go into my vineyard too.' In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first.' So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner. 'The men who came last,' they said, 'have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat.' He answered one of them and said, 'My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last-comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?' Thus the last will be first, and the first, last."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,

maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,

begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;

through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,

he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Receive with favour, O Lord, we pray,
the offerings of your people,
that what they profess with devotion and faith
may be theirs through these heavenly
mysteries.

Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

You have laid down your precepts to be
carefully kept;
may my ways be firm in keeping your
statutes.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Graciously raise up, O Lord,
those you renew with this Sacrament,
that we may come to possess your
redemption
both in mystery and in the manner of our life.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the
church door, you will not find Him in the chalice.

Saint John Chrysostom