

Circuit Worship 20th September 2020 led by Rev Kim Shorley

PRAYER OF PRAISE

Give praise to the God of the Promise,

All: who keeps faith with the earth for ever.

Let us tell among the peoples the things you have done,
and tell of all your marvellous works.

Give praise to the God of the Promise,

All: who keeps faith with the earth for ever.

We exult in your holy name;
even in our seeking we are joyful in heart

Give praise to the God of the Promise,

All: who keeps faith with the earth for ever.

Let us seek your wisdom and strength,
let us seek the compassion of your face

Give praise to the God of the Promise,

All: who keeps faith with the earth for ever.

Let us recall the wonders you have done,
your marvellous acts and your discerning judgements.

Give praise to the God of the Promise,

All: who keeps faith with the earth for ever.

STF 2 COME, LET US SING TO THE ONE,

- 1 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Father of life,
whose light fills the earth like the sun ;
come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Great is the world he has made,
are the myst'ries untold,
is his measureless power of old ;
come, come let us sing to our God.

*To our God, who is able
to strengthen us in his grace
beyond all we imagine,
be all glory and praise,
be all praise.*

- 2 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Saviour of life,
find the fullness of God in the Son ;
come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Wild is the mercy of Christ,
is the richness of grace,
is the unending life we embrace ;
come, come let us sing to our God.

To our God, who is able

3 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Spirit of life,
leading us in the way of the Son ;
come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Strong is the Spirit within,
is the boldness to speak,
is the power to run when we're weak ;
come, come let us sing to our God.

To our God, who is able

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Kristyn Getty (b. 1980)

GENESIS 1:11-19 (NRSV: Anglicized Edition,)

¹¹Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Lord God, Creator of the world, You made all that exists from nothing: Spoke into existence each bird and tree, designed the detail of each butterfly and flower, Made us from dust, one part of your world.

Lord God, Redeemer of the world, You breathe your image into human beings; Inspire us with love for your world, charge us to care for all you have made, Invite us to steward and care for your world.

Lord God, Sustainer of the World, You made your covenant with all living creatures: You watch when a sparrow falls to the ground, You sustain all creation by your word, equip us with the vision and ability to fulfil our task: To act justly, live simply and walk humbly with you, our God, upon this earth, your garden of Creation. Send your Son to bring healing to creation.

Blessed God, Creator, redeemer, sustainer. Through your creative word you brought all of creation into being and you saw it was good. Assure us of your forgiveness as we come to confess those times when we have taken your works for granted

We pray, "**Our Father in heaven ...**"

We confess the times when we have failed to live in awe of you. When we have taken you for granted, and for when we don't see the awesome beauty of the world you have made.

We pray, "**Hallowed be your name...**"

We confess the times when despite our reverence for you we have not cared reverently for your earth, sky and sea.

We pray, "**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...**"

We confess the times when we have put our own interests first, exploiting your creation, and living for our own convenience and self-interest.

We pray, "**Give us today our daily bread.**"

We confess the times when we have consumed more than our share of the world's resources, while billions go hungry every day and your whole creation suffers.

We pray, "**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**"

We confess the times when we see these words only in spiritual terms, while the Bible is filled with teachings about economic justice and creation care.

We pray, "**Save us from the time of trial...**"

Help us to resist the temptations of spending more, using more, acquiring more, and wasting more.

We pray, "**And deliver us from evil.**"

Free us from greed and self-centeredness that separate us from you and others.

We pray, "**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.**"

Help us to know that in caring for your wonderful world, we are working for your kingdom, being good stewards of your creative power, and giving you glory.

We pray, "**Amen.**"

We end our prayers with "Amen," a word that means "let it be so." We know we can be faithful disciples by your grace. Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION:

We sing **STF 693 BEAUTY FOR BROKENNESS,**

- 1 Beauty for brokenness,
hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world
this is our prayer.
Bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset,
your kingdom increase!

- 2 Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for all people,

trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause
of those who can't speak.

God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray:
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain;
come, change our love
from a spark to a flame.

3 Refuge from cruel wars,
havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary,
freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields,
scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness,
his cross for the pain.

4 Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned —
our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed;
make us content with
the things that we need.
God of the poor,

5 Lighten our darkness,
breathe on this flame
until your justice burns
brightly again;
until the nations
learn of your ways,
seek your salvation
and bring you their praise.
God of the poor,

Graham Kendrick (*b. 1950*)

MATTHEW 20: 1-16 (NRSV: Anglicized Edition,)

The Labourers in the Vineyard

20¹For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And 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?"⁷ They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard."⁸ 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."⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner,¹² 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."¹³ 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?¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

REFLECTION

Jesus loves to use picture language that people could relate, nature was all around the people of Jesus' day, and here within the Nene Valley I think we could almost say the same thing, as hopefully we have all caught a glimpse of the cycle of nature from seed sowing to harvest as we have travelled across the circuit. (and of course, that includes waiting patiently behind the odd tractor or two?)

As with the parables we heard over the summer Jesus is telling us something about our relationship with God and at this time of harvest I offer two thoughts about growing God's Kingdom:

Firstly, it is God, the landowner, and not us who plants the Kingdom of heaven. In fact, it could be argued that the same is true of the growth of God's Kingdom.

Yes as labourers, as good stewards within the vineyard we can create conditions upon the earth where it is given the opportunity to grow more speedily and more fully, but we can also hinder it by our actions or inaction, but in the same way that it is the creative power of God behind the miracle contained within a seed, so it is with God's Kingdom. As the second line of most harvesty of harvest hymns, 'We plough the fields and scatter', affirms the miracle of growth, indeed of all nature is that "it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand."

Secondly, like the vineyard in our Gospel Passage, Jesus's lesson here is about gratitude and motivation, not about reward for work done. It is also not about a reward of salvation (which works do not earn).

So often and so easily do we slip into judging by human values, I can still hear the words spoken (more likely to be shouted) from myself during those early years of sibling rivalry "its not fair" and if radical honesty is to be embraced within our pulpits, and most importantly with our lives, we all continue to be challenged by our moral assumptions, our sense of fair, our understanding of how "things ought to be."

Whereas Jesus is telling those who will listen, and that includes us today, that God's abundant generosity will always, and without fail, exceed our human understanding.

Yet within this parable there is no denial of justice, those who were called first, whose burden was day long receive their fair and promised daily wage, neither are they disadvantaged by the fact that the other labourers all got paid that same wage.

Their grievance comes as they watch their assumed reward and power status as day-long workers dissolving in light of God's covenant of grace; and their charge "you have made **them** equal to **us**." This encounter with envy takes us in 2020 to some deep places within ourselves and our society, as it did with the original hearers who Matthew records in Chapter 19 verse 23 were Christ's own disciples.

As Christians we have watched, commented on and been challenged by the many "Them and Us" issues that have been raised recently; the Me-Too Movement, Equal marriage, Black Lives Matters, Brexit even asked the country to vote on it, and divided families and communities along the way. As I began to ponder and prepare for this service at the end of August I was acutely aware that our news reporters and their headlines wanted to continue to tell a story to 'us' of 'them' - those migrants (economic or otherwise) and refugees who did not 'deserve' our or anyone's help, even though many had risked their very lives to flee areas of conflict and poverty.

When we imagine God's Kingdom, who is it that is missing? When we call for justice or "just us" treatment, *and we must be honest in confessing that we so often do*, God surprises us (and maybe even outrages us) with a generosity that serves all.

Can we learn to see ourselves and others through the eyes of God? As the declaration from God through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah states "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," and "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9
NIV

As disciples of Christ we are called to be good labourers. Instead of worrying about what others are getting, and worldly concepts of fairness, we must see the reward we already have. Jesus invites you and I to transform our complaints about those who arrive 'late' to the vineyard into celebration, to rejoice that they have come to join the work, as together we harvest the kingdom fruit of God's Holy Spirit, generously given as gift to each one of us as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control Galatians 5:22-23

We take a moment of to listen, to be still before and with God – to hear what God is saying to us at this time.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What does this story or parable as it is titled in the NIV, of the Labourers in the Vineyard reveal to you about God's character?
- How does knowing the last shall be first, and the first will be last sit with you, especially if you have been labouring for God since daybreak?
- Are you able to recall a time when God has been 'unfairly' generous towards you?

STF 416 THERE'S A WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY

- 1 There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

- 2 There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.
- 3 There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.
- 4 For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
- 5 But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.
- 6 If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

BLESSING

Go out from here
as workers in God's upside-down kingdom,
where the last are first and the first are last,
where needs are met in miraculous ways,
and there is grace enough for all!

And may the blessing of God,
the love of Jesus Christ,
and the presence of the Holy Spirit
surround you and sustain you in the coming days.
Amen.

Please be assured that we are still here if you need anything at all during this time.

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