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**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION**

**SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2023 - TRINITY 16**

**COLLECT**

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers

of your people who call upon you;

and grant that they may both perceive and know

what things they ought to do,

and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;

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.

**Psalm 145.1-8**

1    I will exalt you, O God my King,  ♦

and bless your name for ever and ever.

2    Every day will I bless you  ♦

and praise your name for ever and ever.

3    Great is the Lord and highly to be praised;  ♦

his greatness is beyond all searching out.

4    One generation shall praise your works to another  ♦

and declare your mighty acts.

5    They shall speak of the majesty of your glory,  ♦

and I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

6    They shall speak of the might of your marvellous acts,  ♦

and I will also tell of your greatness.

7    They shall pour forth the story of your abundant kindness  ♦

and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

8    The Lord is gracious and merciful,  ♦

long-suffering and of great goodness.

**A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians, chapter 1, verses 21-30**

## Philippians 1.21-30

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God’s doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

***Gospel Acclamation (for Communion services only)***

Alleluia! **Alleluia!**

Your word is truth, O Lord: consecrate us in the truth.

**Alleluia!**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 20. 1-16.

**Glory to you, O Lord**

## The Labourers in the Vineyard

‘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.’

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**A Reflection from Hannah…**

The enduring cry of today’s Gospel reading is perceived injustice- ‘it’s not fair!’ Those workers who were hired late in the day receiving a denarius, just the same as those who had endured a full day’s labour in the heat.

Of course, it’s not really a parable about wages and the economy- that’s just the paradigm Jesus uses to teach us something mysterious and counterintuitive about God’s kingdom. We are all the same- the denarius- a cypher for grace or salvation or fullness of life- is given in equal measure, regardless of anything we do.

And there is the bit we still struggle to understand- regardless of anything we do. Our actions have no bearing on God’s potential for grace- all who accept the invitation find abundant life, find it to the same degree, no matter how long ago they did so, or how hard they’ve worked.

It’s an aspect of our faith that challenges human instincts and philosophies. And there is perhaps an enduring temptation to get stuck in one or other of the roles in this parable. Perhaps- as was writ large in pharisaic thinking and the protestant work ethic that still knocks around our souls- perhaps we feel like the worker who was hired at the start of the day- who has slogged and expected some measure of that to be reflected in the reward. The ones working all day though, were also privileged in other ways; they were in a place of security, knowing that they would have money for food and to care for their family. Not so the workers who came later, having waited in the marketplace for someone to hire them- they must have felt deep unease at their immediate future, without work.

But we can also feel like them- like we don’t deserve our denarius because really we’ve not done as much as others we might notice, and we feel unworthy. But in the Gospel grace abounds- there is nothing we can do to garner favour with God, because God’s love and God’s gift is for everyone, without exception. So, when we feel like the hard worker who ought to receive more, it’s good to remember that all fall short of the creative potential that is given us by God, and dwells in each of us. Equally, when we feel that our unworthiness defines us and threatens us to despair, it’s good to remember that we are saved by grace, never works, and the real mystery is the mind of the vineyard owner- the enduring mystery of the mind of God who is love, and the complete upending of our concepts of ‘earning’ justice, salvation, life in all its fullness.