**Sunday 20th September 2020** WORSHIP AT HOME: **Matthew 20.1-16**

Welcome to our act of Worship

Theme: Is it fair!

Call to worship *Psalm 145v1-8*

1 I will extol you, my God and King,  
   and bless your name for ever and ever.  
2 Every day I will bless you,  
   and praise your name for ever and ever.  
3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
   his greatness is unsearchable.

4 One generation shall laud your works to another,  
   and shall declare your mighty acts.  
5 On the glorious splendour of your majesty,  
   and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.  
6 The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,  
   and I will declare your greatness.  
7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,  
   and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
   slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

HYMN

**From all that dwell below the skies**, ***T St Francis***  
Let the Creator's praise arise;

Alleluia!  
Let the Redeemer's name be sung  
Through every land by every tongue.

Alleluia!

Eternal are Thy mercies Lord;  
Eternal truth attends Thy Word;

Alleluia!

Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore  
Till suns shall rise and set no more.

Alleluia!

*HP489, MP-, RS723, STF75*

(Some of the hymn books widely used in the Wiltshire United Area)

*Prayer of Praise based on Psalm 145*

God of all creation, every day we will praise you:  
we adore you **and bless your name forever.**You are greatly to be praised and your greatness is unsearchable:  
we adore you **and bless your name forever.**One generation will tell the story of your great works to another and will describe your mighty acts:  
we adore you **and bless your name forever.**  
We will proclaim all that you have done and declare your greatness:  
we adore you **and bless your name forever.**The world will celebrate your abundant generosity and will sing of your righteousness:  
we adore you **and bless your name forever. Amen.**

*Prayer of Confession*

For the times when we have not lived in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ,

dear Lord: **forgive us.**

For the times when we have not stood firm

to your kingdom values,

dear Lord: **forgive us.**

For the times when we have not united in the Spirit,

dear Lord: **forgive us.**

For the times we have heard your call

but turned away from you,

dear Lord: **forgive us.**

For the times we have not celebrated your goodness and love,

dear Lord: **forgive us.**

We are sorry that we do not always listen,

do not always hear, do not always obey.

*(silence)*

We ask for forgiveness and that you would grant us discernment, courage and strength to be faithful to you. **Amen.**

HYMN

**Praise to the Holiest in the height,** ***T Gerontius***   
and in the depth be praise:  
in all his words most wonderful,  
most sure in all his ways.

O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
a second Adam to the fight  
and to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood,  
which did in Adam fail,  
should strive afresh against the foe,  
should strive and should prevail;

And that a higher gift than grace  
should flesh and blood refine,  
God's presence and his very self,  
and essence all-divine.

O generous love! that he, who smote  
in Man for man the foe,  
the double agony in Man  
for man should undergo;

And in the garden secretly,  
and on the cross on high,  
should teach his brethren, and inspire  
to suffer and to die.

Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
and in the depth be praise:  
in all his words most wonderful,  
most sure in all his ways.

*HP231, MP563, RS103 , STF334*

Ministry of the Word of God

RCL Proper 20 Year A

Jonah 3.10-4.11; Psalm 145.1-8;

Philippians 1.21-30;

**GOSPEL** **Matthew 20.1-16**

The Labourers in the Vineyard

**20‘For 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?” 7They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” 8When 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.” 9When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12saying, “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.” 13But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or** **are you envious because I am generous?” 16So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’**

This is the Gospel of Christ.

**Praise to Christ our Lord.**

Text: **“Are you envious because I am generous?”**

Reflection

In my childhood it was always “Pudding”, not “Dessert” and most certainly never “Sweet”. One my mother made was Upside-Down Pudding, which was literally turned out upside down, so the fruit was on top and the sponge beneath.

There is more than a sense of upside-down in today’s Gospel reading, which should really be called, “The Parable of the Landowner’s Generosity.” We applaud the landowner for his huge generosity to those who worked only one hour, BUT where is fairness by comparison to those who toiled all day? If there is one thing we are all born with, it is an innate sense of the importance of fairness. Watch a bunch of children play and it will not be long before you hear, “That’s not fair!”

We like fairness, it gives a sense of some assurance of order, predictability, control. What happens though when divine goodness trumps human fairness? You get today’s parable!

The parable is actually all about the generosity of God. As the ultimate “landowner,” God will use what has always belonged to the Creator for the good of all even if humans fail to view the world through God’s eyes. Recall Jesus earlier words: God’s perfection is characterised in God giving “rain on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5v48)

**“Are you envious because I am generous?”** The landowner’s question is Jesus’ punchline. If we are truly honest about ourselves, fairness rather than love, acceptance, mercy, forgiveness, or generosity is the measure by which we act and judge another person or life circumstance. Jesus’ parables are meant to get us to think critically!

We may want to broaden our thoughts by reflecting on the employment world of today – sweatshop labour, zero-hours contracts, minimum wage. The parable pulls back the curtain on the ways our own world works, as it would have done for Jesus’ audience, day labourers in a market-place would have been an everyday sight back then.

**“Are you envious because I am generous?”** The generosity of God is summed up in one word ‘grace’. The grace, love and mercy of God are extended equally to everyone. The words, *“the last will be first and the first shall be last”* can make us assume that it is a complete overhaul of the system – up becomes down, down becomes up. But everyone both the first and the last receive the same wage, everyone is on the same plane with regards to the generosity of the landowner.

What we learn about God from this parable, is that he keeps going out in search for people to receive his grace, just as the landowner continued to go to the market hour after hour to find workers for the vineyard. Everyone, even the criminal on the cross, is invited to share in the renewing and reconciling love of God that defeated the darkness of sin and death at Calvary. Jesus beaten, whipped, mocked and nailed to a cross is the generosity of God in action!

May we be as jubilant and ecstatic as those workers who were hired last but who received such generosity from the landowner. May their joy and surprise be ours at the wonderful grace and love that God has in store for each of us.

Prayer of Response

Gracious God, we offer our hands to do your work;  
we offer our hearts to pray for your world;  
we offer our gifts to be used in your service;  
we offer our lives to be changed by your Spirit,  
and we offer our thanks and praise for your over-abundant generosity to us. **Amen**

HYMN

**Sing of the Lord’s goodness *Tune Same***

Father of all wisdom,  
come to him and bless his name.  
Mercy he has shown us, his love is forever,  
faithful to the end of days.

*Refrain:*  
 *Come, then, all you nations,  
 sing of your Lord’s goodness,  
 melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
 Ring out the Lord’s glory,  
 praise him with your music,  
 worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment  
risen from the snares of death.  
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken,  
new life he now gives to all.

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,  
Spirit of our God most high;  
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,  
splendour of the living God.

Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet,  
praise God with the lute and harp;  
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing,  
praise God till the end of days.

*HP, MP, RS, STF65*

Our Prayers

Generous God,  
we pray for those trapped in cruel patterns of behaviour, autocratic rulers and corrupt regimes.

Generous God, **make us generous too.**

We pray for those who are exploited  
by greedy employers and unfair working practices.  
Generous God, **make us generous too.**

We pray for those who struggle to survive  
because of poverty brought about by sickness,  
drought or because their land has been taken away. We think of those affected by the terrible fires in California and Greece.  
Generous God, **make us generous too.**

We pray for those who are excluded, left out  
because of health, gender, diversity, age … Generous God, **make us generous too.**

We give thanks for all who have lived,  
and loved, and made our lives all that it is today.  
We give thanks for the generosity of their talents, gifts and love.  
Generous God, **make us generous too.**  
Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

HYMN ***T Faithfulness***

**Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;**   
there is no shadow of turning with thee;   
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;   
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

*Great is thy faithfulness!   
 Great is thy faithfulness!   
 Morning by morning new mercies I see:  
 all I have needed thy hand hath provided*

*Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above  
join with all nature in manifold witness   
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,   
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,   
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

*HP66, MP200, RS96, STF51*

Blessing

Go into the world filled with grace and generosity.  
Be more than fair,  
showing the tender compassion of God  
who created and redeemed you.

And the blessing of God the Creator, the Redeemer and the Enabler be with you, those you love and those you ought to love, this day and forever. **Amen.**

Rev David Coppard Superintendent @ Wiltshire United Area

Bank Chaplain @ Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton

***Our churches may not all be open, but the Church is active and alive.***

*This is service is offered to any and all, with love and prayers.*

CCL LICENCE

Steeple Ashton Methodist CCL 291605

Warminster United CCL 1221052

Westbury Methodist CCL 781988

Westbury URC CCL 293641

**For little people**

An opportunity to help us think about fairness.

You will need: a toy, game or puzzle with lots of pieces or components.

Share this simple paraphrase and actions.  
**Jesus said: ‘Don’t just think about yourself.** (*point to self*)

**I will share what I have with everyone.’** (*hold out arms*)

Repeat so little people can join in.

Ask for help to share out the pieces ‘fairly’ and play with the toy, game or puzzle together.

**For Everyone for the Coming Week**   
Have two small identical sized cards.

Write on one some resentment or some grudge you hold in your heart, something you believe you lack, or something of which you are envious. Be honest because honesty matters.

Then on the other card write some blessing, some areas of abundance, something for which you are grateful, in your own lives or, just as importantly, in the life of someone else.

Hold each of card face down in the palm of each hand. Notice that, physically, the two cards weigh the same. Yet spiritually one of those cards is weighing you down, while the other is light as a feather.

You must now decide to tear one up and place the pieces in the bin. You cannot keep both. What matters is the choice we make and the reminder we keep with us.  
  
Will we always be true to our choices? No, but perhaps this exercise can help us be more true. In the end, the only one who is true is the One who came preaching, teaching, and embodying this new life and kingdom, the One who was willing to die that we might see and believe that this new life is possible. But let's be clear: while this One is true, he is not fair. Because this One gives us more than we deserve, loving us from the death of scarcity and fear to the new life of abundance, courage, and faith.