

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 20 September 2020
Trinity 15**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. Today, we move on from forgiveness to look at fairness through God's eyes, and to think about how he welcomes everyone. A childhood phrase that comes to mind when reading this week's Gospel passage is, 'It's not fair!' I wonder how many times you've heard one of your children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews, or godchildren say, 'It's not fair!' and then burst into tears or stomp their feet? Or, said it yourself when you were young? It's not fair that you've got a bigger piece of cake than me... you can go to this party but I can't because I'm too young... you won't buy me this toy or gadget when all my friends have one. We've all experienced it and we've all said it. And so have Jesus' team.

May this week's reflections encourage us to be as welcoming in our lives as God is to us. His fairness is to be generous to everyone. May this inspire our thankfulness.

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One,
give thanks for he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.
And now let the weak say, 'I am strong',
and the poor say, 'I am rich',
because of what the Lord has done for us.

Henry Smith

God bless,

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God's Welcome

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence, and feel his love.

If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love, here, in your room. You may also wish to have a cross in your palm, or on the table, and a bowl of water ready for the time of confession.

Lord, as I sit and wait in silence,
I place my hopes and dreams,
my fears and concerns,
into your safe and loving hands.
Pour your love into me,
and fill me with your peace;
in Jesus' name,
I pray. **Amen.**

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, or when you feel you could have been more welcoming to others, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And, when you are ready, reflect on the opening words of our hymn.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence praise,
in deeper reverence praise.



If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.

Feel God's forgiveness. And knowing how much God loves you, pause to make a commitment to mirror this love in your daily living.

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER **(The Collect)**

Across our villages and the worldwide Church, this prayer is being said today. Add your voice to this earthly circle of prayer to our loving Father.

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 our Lord. **Amen.**

Two ideas stand out for me in this week's prayer. The first is 'fellowship' which gives us the image of the church as a family of Jesus' followers. During this time of crisis, we have remained as one as a church family by sharing in these prayers at home, as well as on Zoom and back in church, and by keeping in touch by phone. Fellowship is a strong sign of a church built on love - God's love. Do pause to give thanks for God's gift of love flowing through our benefice.

The second idea is a reflective question, 'What does being active in service look like when we are staying at home or keeping a safe distance from others in our community?' Many of the things that you used to do in church or in other settings may not be possible. You may be missing being useful in the Lord's service. Or, you may be finding new ways to share God's love and care with others, and to keep in fellowship with church friends. Do pause to ponder this question and recommit your life to active service in the Lord's name. PS... Prayer is active service!

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

God's Fairness

Jesus said, '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.'

Matthew 20:1-16

Setting the scene

You may be wondering why Jesus told this story about an owner of a vineyard and his labourers. What prompted this parable? It was Peter! Complaining in the same tone of voice as a child's 'It's not fair!', saying, 'Look, we've left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' And Jesus' response - this story - is to say, 'The same as everyone else... the kingdom of heaven. Isn't that enough!'

A Parable of God's Fairness

Back in Jesus' time, a labourer - such as the ones in this vineyard - would expect to be paid a denarius for a day's work. Those who were chosen at the start of the day would have begun their day's toil in the sunshine with this expectation in mind as - perhaps - would those recruited at 9am. But, those who were still standing around hoping against hope that someone, anyone, would give them an hour or two's work would not have expected to be paid a whole denarius. They'd have been expecting a tenth of this, barely enough for a scrap of bread. Yet - on this occasion - they were blessed with a very caring master who pays everyone the same no matter how many hours they've worked. In his eyes, everyone has contributed to the day's results and should receive a day's reward. It is a generous way of valuing each worker's efforts... but, to those who are bone-weary after eight to ten hours of backbreaking work... 'It just not fair!'

If the owner had paid these workers first, there would not have been a problem. They would have happily taken their day's pay and gone home to their families. Seeing the ones who were hired last getting a full day's pay got them hoping for more. I wonder what they were expecting to receive when their turn came... a denarius for each hour? An extra coin or two for working a full day in the field? When their turn came, with hopes of more in their hearts, one denarius was not enough. They wanted more, even though what they had received was a fair wage.

What went wrong for these hardworking labourers? Well, it was in thinking only about themselves and what they would receive. Instead, they could have thought to themselves, 'Great! Everyone is going home with enough money to feed their families. Praise God, there'll be no one going to bed hungry tonight.' And then, one denarius would have been enough.

Jesus' story offers us two life lessons. The first is to value everyone's contribution to the life of a church... a school... a workplace... a group. Everyone makes a difference. We are not whole without them. And, second, to give thanks when God or life is generous to others.

Life in all its fairness

If I have enough to live on,
if I am treated fairly by others,
if I am loved and valued by family and friends,
colleagues and neighbours,
why wish for anything more?
God will never forget my name,
his love is with me always,
who ask for anything more? It is more than I deserve.



A Parable of God's Welcome

As well as being a parable about God's generous fairness, it is also a sign of how welcoming God is to us. Whether we have always come to church, been a follower of Jesus since our teens or have only begun to wonder about God in later life, God's welcome is the same. Like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, God welcomes each one of us with open arms. He literally runs out to greet us. He is so delighted to see us. There is no sign of an accusation. He doesn't say to us, 'Where have you been?' or 'What time do you call this?'. He just welcomes us in to his kingdom. And, like the labourers in Jesus' story, we all receive God's generous gifts - his love and forgiveness, his Spirit to guide us in life, and his Son's promise of life beyond death. Gifts we cannot earn. We are part of his family, the Church, and are invited to welcome as he welcomes and to want the very best of God's blessings for others as we do for ourselves.

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some prayers on this Sunday's theme. Feel free to use one or more of these prayers, and to add your own.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your generous gifts to me,
and to all of your family - the Church. You have welcomed me
with open arms. I feel I am your beloved child. Help me to see others
as your children too and welcome them in. Your family is incomplete.
Show me who to invite in and, Lord, open up the conversations for me.
Father, hear my prayer.

Father, you want us to do what is just, to love what is merciful,
and to walk humbly with you, our God. As I hear the news,
and watch what is happening in the world, I see so much unfairness.
People who are being treated as though they are worth less than others,
refugees who are being turned away from safe havens,
parents who are struggling to feed their families. Help me to help them.
Father, hear my prayer.

Father, life can feel so unfair when a loved one is in a lot of pain,
and their future uncertain. Help me to trust in your generous love
and steadfast care. I lift up to you those whose ill-health or sadness
is on my heart. Lord, give them wholeness of life,
and grant me the patience to trust in your loving response.

Father, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

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.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

Lord, bless and guide me,
whatever I do, whether at home or outside.
Go before me, watch over me,
and keep me, and my loved ones, safe in your love. **Amen.**