Trinity 16 A Sunday, 20 September 2026

By the Reverend Ruth Li

Scriptures: Isaiah 55:6-13; Psalm 145:14-21; Phil 1:19-26; Matthew 20:1-16.

In a very real sense, since we decided, or it was decided for us, to believe in Jesus through our baptism and confirmation, our faith journey has well and truly begun. The Church, as the Heavenly Kingdom on earth (St Augustine's *City of God*), includes people of every age who put their trust in Jesus. Some people started their faithful journey when they were born and grew up in a Christian family environment; some were at schools, universities, and workplaces; for some it was in their difficult times; some were in their retirement, when they looked back on their lives, they realised that there was a mighty hand protecting them; and some were on their bed at the last breath, they called the name of Jesus to save them… It is just like the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), which pictures what it would be like at the Lord Jesus' return.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16) is the continuation of St Matthew's Heavenly Kingdom theme, which Fr Robert has preached to us during the year. This parable reveals and highlights that in the Heavenly Kingdom, divine reward is rooted in grace rather than human merit. The landowner represents God's generosity and grace as equal payment to all workers, redefines God's justice, and warns against jealousy and entitlement in Church life.

This parable explores the contrast between human fairness and divine generosity,

In this parable, the landowner agrees to pay the standard daily wage (a denarius) to those who worked all day. However, when he hires others at the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours, he promises to give them "whatever is right" (v4). At the end of the day, all the workers—even those who worked only one hour—receive the exact same pay. The landowner isn't being unjust; he is being extravagantly generous to the latecomers.

The parable warns of the human trap of entitlement.

The crisis in the story unfolds when the workers who worked hard all day grumble because the latecomers are paid the same as they are. They look at what others received and feel shortchanged. The landowner's response to the grumblers is definitive: "Friend, I am doing you no wrong... Or are you envious because I am generous?" (v13-15).

In the Anglican tradition, this is frequently interpreted as a cautionary tale against spiritual pride. When we view God's grace as something we earn, we reduce faith to a transaction and fall into the trap of resenting God's mercy shown to others.

This parable shows us God's grace as the ultimate equaliser. It concludes with the famous declaration: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (v16). This parable is a masterclass on the theology of grace. Whether a person comes to faith early in life or at the "five o'clock" (v6) (e.g., at the end of their life), the gift of God's Kingdom remains entirely a

matter of grace. It teaches that no one can boast about their works, because God's love and salvation cannot be quantified or "earned" through labour.

Some people perhaps will think in a calculating way: "OK. If that is how the Kingdom of God works, then I will come into the Church later after finishing my worldly things." However, calculation is just another form of entitlement. These people have never learned the reality of God's grace, nor do they know the Kingdom of God, and may find their calculating mind, just like an entitled mind, will backfire upon them.

Let God be God! Leave our lives and the lives of others in God's hands. It is not about how many years we have believed in Jesus, how long we have worked in the Church, nor what positions or roles we have taken in the past. It really depends on God's grace and on what God knows of our hearts' desires, our attitudes towards His Heavenly Kingdom, and our actions on His commandments and decrees.

Our faithful journey has begun; each day is new for each of us. If we focus on the King, Jesus Christ, His Heavenly Kingdom, and our own works for Him, we never see others as the workers in the vineyard in the parable (Matt. 20:1-16) who grumbled against the landowner for his generosity to others. We should be grateful for God's gift of grace at all times.

We cannot follow Jesus while looking around at other people or things. If we do, we will lose the way to the Heavenly Kingdom, as the parable today warned us.

Let us learn from this parable of the labourers in the vineyard, be happy with what we have received from God, and be grateful for being part of the Body, the Church, working hard according to the Master's calling, and glorify His holy name for ever and ever. Let us work as one for God's Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

God is generous in opening the doors of his kingdom to all who will enter, both those who have laboured a lifetime for him and those who come at the last hour. While the reward is the same, the motive for one's labour can make all the difference. Some work only for reward. They will only put in as much effort as they think they will get back. Others labor out of love and joy for the opportunity to work and to serve others. The Lord Jesus calls his disciples to serve God and neighbour - his heavenly kingdom and our earthly community - with generosity and joy. Do you perform your work and responsibilities with cheerfulness and diligence for the Lord's sake? And do you give generously to others, especially to those in need of your care and support?

"Lord, give us a heart to serve you and our neighbours with gladness and generosity, not looking for how much we can get, but rather, looking for how much we can give."
In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.