



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Allie Joseph



Sunday 20 September 2020

READINGS

Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Phil 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

Learning generosity from God

I imagine what went through the minds of the laborers at the end of the day. The guys who were hired the last came forward to be paid first, one denarius each. The guys who were hired first hastily making calculations. There were surprises all round that day. This parable has many people wondering about how Jesus understood justice and fairness. Surely, we wonder how it could be fair to have someone work all day and another work just one hour and at the end of the day both get the same wage. I am sure some of us identified with the workers who started work at 6am and with a smile I acknowledge those among us who would identify with the workers who only worked only one hour and still got paid the same.

Allow me to look at the parable and bring out some of the lessons that may seem difficult to identify at first glance. Matthew includes this parable here to bring us to a deeper understanding of God's understanding of generosity and giving. The parable is about the kingdom of heaven and the reward is eternal life. We all have the same day in which to work for our reward. One life with which to gain eternal life. We are all called at different times of the day to work in the vineyard of God, our reward is eternal life.

We live in a world that values everything by how much it is worth in money. People are valued by how much money they have. People associate with those in their socio-economic class and, people are divided into those who have and those who have not. In a country where we have people begging on almost every street corner, with unemployment on the rise and youth unemployment skyrocketing we have serious readjustments to make. More and more people find themselves in financial difficulty. Even the church in our diocese is facing challenges because of the current financial situation affecting parishes. We hear the words, the first will be last and the last first. A time for us to relook the way we value ourselves, people, things, and money.

A few weeks ago I was talking to a young friend of mine and he said South Africa is probably the only country where the government can misappropriate billions and have a television announcement about it, just telling the people the money is gone and they will use more of the people's money to find out who took the money. A serious reminder that what we do now will matter long after we receive our reward.

The parable unveils a truth that we need to hear. It is possible to be generous without loving or caring for people, but it is impossible to love and care for people without being generous to them. When Jesus offers eternal life to the less deserving, he takes nothing from the more deserving. We do not need to judge our brothers and sister, we

must learn to see them as God does, and love them generously. In the parable the landowner goes out himself, he calls people to work in his vineyard. He encounters them, each in their own circumstances at different times. He calls them and at the end of the day he is generous and gives. God is busy calling us, each in our own way, to serve.

It is true that the world is just a pandemic away from being financially challenged, for some of us it is a pay check, a contract or a deal that does not materialise. Some of us read the parable and we see the injustice first, not the mercy and generosity, and we ask how this can be. The lesson is clear, we need to change the rules of the game and be generous like God is. We have a real problem at hand, in a world that teaches a zero-sum game, a game where one side can win only if the other side loses. In this same world we are called to be generous.

A society that teaches you must be first, the best and most ambitious. We teach our children to be the best they can be, we encourage the competitive spirit and we demand the best. At what cost? We see a world falling down a slippery slope of achievement and instant gratification. Ambition is encouraged even in God's church.

In the words of a Mother Theresa, the headmistress of a Loretto convent school in India who heard the call to go and serve the poor, "give until it hurts." People will always ask but how would this generosity be practiced in real life; the Christian must compete in a world that is all about the bottom line, having an edge over the rest, climbing the corporate ladder and seeking advancement over others in the team. In this same world we are called to be generous.

Young people will tell you how busy they are at school, how demanding the curriculum is and how little time they have. They are being given the same language the rest of the world are struggling with. And in the quest to be the best, be first, they learn to see others as losers. What a loss. This is the time to become involved and active. Young people are the life of the church and should be its strongest witness.

The corona virus is teaching us many lessons and I hope and pray that we learn fast and get better at taking care of our planet and our fellow brothers and sisters. Let us not fail to learn this lesson: Christians are to be generous. We should see our time, our talents, and our resources as gifts from God. As Christians we must enter the world as it is and show it the generosity of God. Do not feel you loose when in the process you are asked to give or to do things for others. Do not feel you loose when you share with others or help others. God who is calling you will sustain you. We are called to witness to Christ in this world, in this life, so that we be rewarded with everlasting life.

"It is a fact that people are always aware of what is due them. Unfortunately, they remain oblivious of what they owe to others."-St. Francis de Sales