



## Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

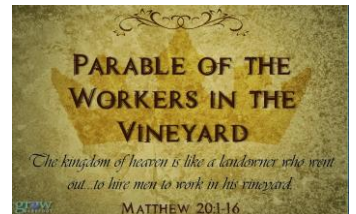
### Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020

1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
2. Read the passage again and spend understanding. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
4. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
5. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



### **THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Matthew 20:1-16** *The parable of the workers in the vineyard*

*Jesus said to his disciples, "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 marketplace; 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."*



### **A Short Thought**

If you are anything like me you could re-read this parable a couple of times come up with a slightly different angle on it, depending on the word or phrase you use to summarize the story.

Firstly, The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is about coveting, about our frustration with the grace of God as it applies not to us, but to others. Coveting lies at the heart of this parable in a couple of ways. We covet what God chooses to give to others. We are invited to see ourselves in the story, and then apply it to ourselves. The wages at stake (even at the moment of Jesus' first telling of the parable) are not actual daily wages for vineyard-laborers, but forgiveness, life, and salvation for believers. We need not literally be laborers in a vineyard, as we are all of us co-workers in the kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:9). The point here isn't necessarily that other folks receive blessings from God that we don't -- that they get more or better or lovelier gifts from God. The problem is that they get the same as us; and they don't deserve it, do they? They are less worthy, or later arrivals, or just plain worse sinners. They don't deserve the same as we get, do they? Not nothing maybe, but certainly not the same. The parable's day laborers parallel perfectly with today's forgiven-sinners in both our pews and pulpits.

We have a tendency, as the parable aptly illustrates, to covet and to be resentful of what others receive from God. The point is that God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness are God's to give away as God sees fit. As a direct result of this, we covet God's power to forgive and God's control over who is forgiven and how.

Secondly, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard is about the first and the last. The parable itself displays a reversal of expectations -- The last are literally first in that they are paid first. And the first, who have laboured

longest, must also wait the longest to get theirs. But notice as well that the first who are now last do not receive nothing or less, they receive the same, as the laborers themselves say, "you have made them equal to us...." So perhaps it should be said that the last shall be first, and the first shall be the same.

The scandal of this parable is that we are all equal recipients of God's gifts. The scandal of our faith is that we are often covetous and jealous when God's gifts of forgiveness and life are given to other in equal measure. And the scandal of our preaching, if based on this parable, ought to encompass both.

## SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. A difficult parable! Should the landowner have given the 'late' workers more or the 'early' workers less? He gave all a day's wage as anything less would have been derisory. That being the case the landowner was generous, not mean. What do you think? Do you see an application to your own life?
2. God gives his love, all of his love, to every person without exception if they open themselves to this love. It does not matter whether that happens early or late in life as this love can never be earned, only accepted. The fact that the latecomers were only employed at the last hour does not make their needs any less than those who came earlier. How big is my need for God today?
3. "I was there first". Envy easily comes to the surface when faced with the good fortune of others, especially when compared to what seems less favourable treatment of ourselves. Can you recall that feeling in yourself and what it did to you? Can you also recall times when you were content with your lot, even though it seemed others had greater gifts, better opportunities, etc.
4. A parent or teacher who gives a lot of time to a difficult child does not love the others less, but if we are one of those other children we may not see that. Recall a "Jesus person" in your life who helped you to overcome feelings of envy and helped you appreciate that the apparently more favourable treatment of another did not mean a lessening of love for you.

## Prayer -

God most high, your ways are not our ways, for your kindness is lavished equally upon all. Teach us to welcome your mercy towards others, even as we hope to receive mercy ourselves.. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen**

### Prayer in these uncertain times

*We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen*

