

Dear Friends,

I wonder how you are this week; what life has brought to you and how you are feeling. Once again I am writing to you from my study which overlooks the city; today as I look out of the window I watch the wind blowing the leaves on the trees, and note that those leaves are beginning to change colour, and that if I look into my garden I can see that the leaves are starting to fall. The seasons roll on as expected, even in this very strange year. I pause to look back, noting that we have been unable to celebrate many things in the way we might have; Easter was celebrated differently, but that did not change its power, it simply meant that we encountered it from a different perspective. Likewise as we move into the season of Harvest Festivals we will need to find other ways of celebrating, and yet the harvest will be gathered in, and just as we celebrated the rising of Christ from the tomb, so we can celebrate the provision of God for us, and mark it I hope by sharing that goodness with others as we so often do! I encourage you to find ways to do that, maybe by donating to your local Food Bank, maybe by considering giving to the All We Can harvest appeal, the 'Change Begins with a Bicycle' campaign. Please consider looking them up.

The sharing of resources and the care of one another is of course a part of our Christian discipleship, and these strange times have meant that we are being challenged to consider what that means for us in the circumstances that we find ourselves in. What does it mean to love and care for our neighbour, whether that means the person next-door, or whether that means somebody on the other side of the world? How are we stewards of God's creation, and how does God see equal and fair sharing?

With that in mind I offer you this week's Gospel reading. I encourage you to read it slowly, and to consider whether a phrase or a theme stands out for you:

'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)

This parable has always been a difficult one. How on earth could it be that those who worked all day are paid the same as those who have worked for the last hour? Surely that is not fair! Not fair; I remember those words coming from the lips of my children when they felt that one had received preferential treatment for some reason. I probably spoke them too if I felt the same when I thought my sister was "getting" something I wasn't.

It's not fair, words easily spoken, but what is fairness, and indeed is fairness the point? All of those who went into the harvest fields to work needed to eat, and needed to support their families, 1 hour's wage was not sufficient for that, and so the landowner was generous and gave them what they needed to live. I wonder if we often read the parable as those who have worked all day. We empathise with the ones we see

as the hard workers, and perhaps we have a jaded view of those who have worked for only an hour. What might we be telling ourselves about them? Maybe they have only just bothered to turn up, lazing about in bed until now; but wait, maybe they have walked miles, having already sought employment elsewhere. The truth is we do not know their story! It is so easy to judge one another!

In times of Covid-19 it seems to me that there is a lot of judgement going on; all over the country cases are on the rise, and it is easy to blame others for that. The young, those who live in highly built up areas where social distancing is exceedingly difficult, those people over there who do not get it because they are not like us! Perhaps it is time for us to take the attitude of the landowner in Jesus' parable and think about being generous with our lives and attitudes. Loving one another in these days, as we said right back in March when lock-down began, looks quite different in a global pandemic. Maybe we simply need to revisit the words we so often pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread...", and consider Jesus' words when he invites us not to worry about today, but to consider the God who created and clothes the flowers of the fields...(Matthew 6)

When we consider fairness in the face of our demands, maybe the world begins to look different; we want to get back to what was, to live our lives as we want to, but right now we can't. Due to Covid-19, local lockdowns are being implemented, new restrictions are being brought in, everything seems uncertain. It is deeply uncomfortable and distressing for many; we are living in unfamiliar times. But, let us not be those who grumble against others, be they those we believe are not doing what is needed, or the government, no matter what our political view. Yes, we can critique - grumbling however is another matter; just consider that! Instead let us look to be those who share, who listen to the story of the other, and who seek to find God, even in the frustrations, the restrictions, and the questions that these days bring. We look to God, who will care for us and has not left us. I share with you the words of this hymn:

*All my hope on God is founded,
all my trust he shall renew;
he, my guide through changing order,
only good and only true:
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.*

*Day by day our mighty giver
grants to us his gifts of love;
in his will our souls find pleasure,
leading to our home above:
love shall stand at his hand,
joy shall wait for his command.*

*Pride of man and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
all that human toil can fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.*

*Still from Earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done;
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son:
hear Christ's call, one and all –
we who follow shall not fall.*

May our hope be founded in God's love, may our trust be in God-provision, and may our hearts be as the heart of Christ who came and shared his life, and gave his life among us, and for us.

Once again if you would like to talk, I am available.

Many blessings



Reverend Sally Coleman