

Materials for Virtual Worship

Sunday 20 September Trinity 15

Collects for 15th Sunday After Trinity

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 your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Lord God,
defend your Church from all false teaching
and give to your people knowledge of your truth,
that we may enjoy eternal life
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Readings

Philippians 1: 21-end

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

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Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Matthew's Gospel 20: 1-16

'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

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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.' Amen

Reflection

Are you envious because I am generous?

It's probably a good thing that they didn't have trade unions in Jesus day. What would they have made of the landowner's method of paying his labourers in the vineyard? They would no doubt have been appalled by the way the landowner treated the workers who toiled all day. If bonuses were to be paid surely those who had done the most work should earn the biggest bonuses? Where is the concept of a fair days work for a fair days wage? Where are the proper differentials?

Just think of the problems that we have on the railways at the moment. Because there is a shortage of train drivers some rail companies have increased their wages well above inflation in order to attract more drivers. The result of this is that in those companies the guards (who are not in short supply) have been striking because they have not received the same wage rise as the drivers.

How would the unions have dealt with this landowner? I don't know, and I don't think it really matters,

First Because there weren't any unions and

Second Because although there is an obvious unfairness about the way the landowner paid his workers no landowner even in Jesus day would have done it.

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The story is a parable and parables aren't real life stories. The point is not about how landowners should or shouldn't treat their labourers but about how God treats us. The unreality of the parable, the improbable way in which the landowner acts would have struck Jesus' audience straight away. They would have been aware that the landowner represented God and that the parable tells us that the way that God deals with people isn't the same as paying wages for a job done or fulfilling a contract of employment.

It is all too easy to see God as the God of the Church and not of the world. To feel that God's mercy and forgiveness are our right rather than an expression of God's gracious love. We can imagine that we are in some privileged position with God, that we are more deserving of God's mercy and grace than others. There is even a brand of Christianity called the prosperity Gospel, particularly associated with certain American Televangelists. They suggest that if you become a Christian life will go so much better for you. You will receive a whole series of blessings, your family will do well, you'll pass your exams, your business will prosper, you'll get promotion. Of course, conversely if you're not a Christian your family will fall apart, your business will fail and so on and so on. But it doesn't work like that as it says in St Matthew's Gospel

'The Father makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends the rain on the just and the unjust'.

The whole point of grace and mercy is that they are undeserved. In one sense the more undeserved it is the greater the mercy. For God to show mercy and concern for the entire world doesn't mean that we are any less the recipients of God's grace. All people are reliant on God for their existence; it was God the creator who brought the world into existence. It is through God's grace that we are saved. God sent his son Jesus to live and die for us. This was a gracious gift of God to us; it was not something that was earned. The Bible is

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quite clear that we were totally undeserving of God's gift of salvation. The words of the General Thanksgiving also point out our unworthiness

Almighty God, Father of all mercies we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving kindness to us and to all me. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.'

We worship and praise God not so that he will be good to us but in response to his goodness and grace towards us. How much greater is a God who encompasses the whole world and how much more worthy of our praise. It is not for us to decide when and to whom God is merciful. We should rather be grateful for the mercy and love that he shows to us. We should try where possible to be agents of God's grace and to rejoice and be thankful when we see that grace at work. The cause of Jonah's anger towards God that he is a gracious God, merciful and slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love are precisely the reasons why God is worthy of our praise and worship. Amen

Ian Fisher

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Hymn (Gradual)

- 1 Fight the good fight with all thy might;
Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right;
lay hold on life, and it shall be
thy joy and crown eternally.

- 2 Run the straight race through God's good grace,
lift up thine eyes, and seek his face;
life with its way before us lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

- 3 Cast care aside, lean on thy guide;
his boundless mercy will provide;
trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

- 4 Faint not nor fear, his arms are near;
he changeth not, and thou art dear;
only believe, and thou shalt see
that Christ is all in all to thee.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811-1875)
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Hymn (at Offertory)

Father, hear the prayer we offer

- 1 Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.
- 2 Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.
- 3 Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.
- 4 Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Love Maria Willis (nee Whitcomb) (1824-1908), Samuel Longfellow (1819-1892)
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Post Communion Prayer

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy;
and, because without you our human frailty cannot but fall,
keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful,
and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen