

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

23rd September 2020

'It's not fair'.

The parents among us are probably all too familiar with that phrase from our offspring - possibly accompanied by a grumpy expression or even a stamp of the foot! As children, we probably uttered it ourselves. As adults, we may still sometimes think it but are probably a bit more subtle about how we express it!

I'm not talking here about situations of real injustice, oppression, abuse or exploitation - or even plain illogicality. Then it must be right to speak out, to protest and call others to account. What I'm thinking about are the times when we perhaps feel a bit disgruntled or resentful because in our view someone else is getting a better deal.

These thoughts arose out of the reading which we didn't hear on Sunday. If we hadn't substituted a reading for Harvest Thanksgiving, we'd have heard the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Here's a summary to remind you: workers are hired at different times during the day but at the end of it, those who had been working all day are peeved to find that they are paid the same as those who've only done an hour or so. (The text is at the end of this 'Thought' in case you want to read it for yourselves.)

One approach to the parable is to see it being about God's generosity, mercy and compassion. But I find myself thinking about that first group of workers; about what the story tells us about us as much as about God. So often when we think something isn't fair, it means we don't like it or we can't do what we want. Frequently we are very self-orientated. Perhaps you'd like to think back to a moment when you've thought something wasn't fair. By the time you read this, we will know what new restrictions are being introduced to combat the accelerating spread of Covid-19. You might like to remember and reflect on your immediate response when you heard them. Our reactions may well say more about us than about the situation.

In the parable, the first workers are so busy being resentful that they forget the blessings of their own situation. They haven't had the anxiety of standing there hour after hour wondering if they would be hired; wondering if they would be able to feed their family that day. They don't seem particularly glad for themselves and they aren't glad others have found work. It would have been so easy for them all to go home together rejoicing, yet instead I imagine there were mutterings and dark glances between the different groups.

When we are tempted to say something isn't fair, I wonder if we should stop and ask ourselves what is really going on. What lies behind that reaction? Do we need to look at things differently? Are we looking at what we have got or what we lack? Our consumer society is always encouraging us to do the latter, refusing to let us be satisfied with what we have. Are we grateful for what we have or envious of what someone else has? Do we see blessings or misfortunes in our circumstances? Do we see something as a gift or our entitlement? And what about the bigger picture? Are we living in solidarity with and with compassion for other people or in competition with them?

Is something not fair - or are you not being fair in your assessment of it?

A change in perspective gives us the opportunity to grow closer to God in gratitude for all that he gives us but also will change how we relate not just to other people but to the whole of creation.

With my love and prayers

Camilla

Matthew 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 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.'

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