

## Thought for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September - Trinity 15

### Matthew 20: 1-16

What should we make of today's parable? Is it a story about labour relations or is it a straightforward demonstration of the tremendous, unconditional, generosity of God?

Or maybe the *real* story is not so much about God's generosity as about human meanness – a lack of generosity among the labourers in God's vineyard – none of whom want anyone else to be paid at a better rate than them. This meanness is a flaw that some of us might recognise in ourselves if we are brutally honest – I know the idea makes me squirm.



The Lord in the parable shows love to his workers. He offers each of them a fair day's wages – so they all know that at the end of the day they will have their hard earned money – a fair day's wage agreed at the start of the morning. Food on the table for a little while longer. The men left behind, hanging around in the hot sunshine at the labour exchange, must have felt miserable – as hour after hour went by and all they felt they could look forward to was creeping home to a hungry family in the evening with nothing to show for their trouble. What a miracle the Lord's generosity must have seemed after they had worked that single eleventh hour.

What about the man who wrote this Gospel – St Matthew, whose feast day is tomorrow? Matthew Levi, we are told, was a tax collector. That means he was hated – seen as a collaborator with the Roman occupiers, probably dishonest, certainly in a position to feather his own nest at the expense of his fellow countrymen. He may have been in a good place materially during those years at the tax office, but I bet he wasn't happy. The name 'Levi' tells us he came from a good family – the priestly tribe. But he had been living as an outcast among his own people for years, and must have been quite as miserable going about his business as the men at the labour exchange without work or hope of remuneration. Then along came Jesus and called him. And that was that.

God calls us – each of us – to work in his vineyard. He will bring us in to work for his kingdom just soon as we are ready. Some of us join his workforce early in life. Others spend years resisting the call, partying hard, wandering around in the wilderness, feeling aimless while pretending to be having a whale of a time. Then, in middle age, or later still, or in the very twilight of their lives, they find that God still wants them in his team. That's an offer too good to refuse.

God's ways are not fair are they? No, they are absurdly, ridiculously, overwhelmingly generous. And loving. How amazing is the grace of God!

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