

Sermon: 20 September 2020 Trinity 15 Jonah 3:10-end of 4, Matthew 20:1-16

Dear Lord, open our eyes and our hearts to recognise your ways are different from our ways. Amen

- "It's not fair!" - growing up as the "little sister" with 2 older brothers I remember shouting this out quite often and also my mother's response.. "Life's not fair " and had to swallow my annoyance and just get on with it. How true my mothers' words were and still are, but how hard they are to swallow.
- Life is definitely not fair - Jonah feels that very strongly - why on earth should God save the sinners and sworn enemies of his , the people of Nineveh (just because they had repented, hah!) and the labourers in the vineyard who worked all day and got the same amount of money as the latecomers certainly felt life was unfair!
- I'm sure those of you who have come to know me over the past years will recognise me as a bit of a fighter for justice and fairness. Certainly a few years ago I seethed at what I saw to be the blatant *unfairness* in this Gospel story of people getting paid the same wage for widely different amounts of work - the yet to be conceived trades unions would have a field day if that happened nowadays...
- Except , would they?.....actually now I come to look at the story more carefully, I think not.
- The landowner entered into a verbal contract with the workers he hired earlier in the day- they each accepted the rate of 1 denari, and he faithfully paid them - nothing to complain about there at a work tribunal - even if he did make them stand at the back of the queue, forcing them to observe his generosity towards those hired at 5pm as he paid all his workers the same amount.
- So stop and think - why are the early labourers moaning? Not because the contract was broken , but because they couldn't bear to see an act of kindness and generosity to their fellow human beings.....ouch. Not really something you want to shout about now is it?
- A case of too much focussing on self, too much focussing on feeling hard done by, too much wanting to find a scapegoat for their own frustrations and insecurities perhaps?
- Not enough looking behind the situation, putting themselves in the place of the 5pm labourers and letting compassion and understanding flood into their hearts.
- "Life's not fair " but people always have a backstory and I wonder whose life in this story is "not fair" - the labourers hired early in the day, or those hired at 5pm?.....

In the bigger picture isn't it far more likely to be the latecomers for whom life is "not fair"

- Let's consider *why* these workers were still waiting in the market place , the job centre of the time, at 5pm? v7 *They said to him, "Because no one has hired us."*

Why was that I wonder?

- It can't be that there was no work- because at 5pm they got work
- It wasn't that they were lazy- or they wouldn't have been there at all
- It was just that they were not as employable as the people who got hired at earlier stages in the day- in the world's eyes they were not as important.
- They were still in the market place in the hope of finding work that day because to them, 1 denari probably meant the difference between their wives and children having food or going hungry for a day. and they didn't want to steal food instead of earn it .
- They were actually crying out for help - they didn't even ask how much they would earn, they were grateful for anything they could earn.
- Perhaps they were thin, even disabled in some way, maybe not physically able to carry out a full day's work- imagine a plausible backstory for these workers, take a moment to look behind what you can see and ask why?
- The landowner saw them and was surprised by their persistence and this moved him to compassion. He could see their plight and the self esteem they sought and he welcomed them in.

The landowner of course represents God.

Our wonderful God of inclusion, love, compassion and welcome.

- “Life’s not fair” but our Christian God sees that and is gracious, he loves us more than we can ever grasp and is moved when we call out to Him for help because he is waiting for us to move towards Him and accept his overflowing grace and love and compassion, and we don’t need to be afraid of our past, our failings, our feelings of unworthiness to call on Him, it’s never too late to do this for the first time, and it’s something as long-standing Christians we should do frequently because that builds up our loving relationship with Him of praise and thankfulness, repentance and forgiveness.
- The overflowing love God showed that meant that He sent Jesus His son to live amongst us, die for us (something that was totally “unfair”) and to rise again, defeating death in order to make us right with God when we accept and trust Jesus and ask for forgiveness of our sins.
- Those 5pm workers did not go hungry that night: imagine their self esteem skyrocketing because they had found work, that someone had reached out to them and shown them love.

We all struggle in various ways and at various times, and actually we in western countries are very fortunate compared with a lot of the people in the world - “life’s not fair” - but God knows our pain, God knows our confusion and anxiety, our medical needs and where we need help and he is overjoyed when we come to Him and reach out our hands and our hearts to Him, because His love is unconditional and empowering and everlasting.

- And he also knows when we live a life of plenty, where the phrase “life’s not fair” is seen from the other side, which we are perhaps too quick to ignore- in those times too God asks us to reach out to Him and ask for help in working out what to do to make life fairer for others.
- And if we do reach out to God, pray, step back and listen, He will enfold us in his love, transform us and build us up in ways that are fulfilling and long-lasting, and He will transform us to live lives that look fairer in His eyes, fairer for all people and fairer for the world we live in.

So let’s learn to love people as God does- accepting our differences, making the best of the “hand that life has dealt us” and trying to model ourselves more and more on Jesus - God in human form. Sometimes all it takes is for us to bite back the sarcastic comment, pause and let God in to a situation, recognise the stress or anxiety the other person may be showing and make allowances even when you can’t agree, and try really hard to look at the world through God’s eyes and live through His love and patience and generosity.

Let’s not be like moaning Jonah - who couldn’t quite move forward and give up feeling a bit hard done by because the people of Nineveh turned their lives around and weren’t the people Jonah could moan about or hate any more.

Let’s rather be like the landowner who saw the chance to help other people and raise them up, as we always see Jesus doing.

“Life’s not fair” - but it becomes a whole lot fairer when we learn to see through God’s eyes and act and speak through His love.

Amen

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