**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**20th September 2020**

**Matthew 20:1-16**

**Welcome**

Hello. Thanks for making space again for us to be together… It is never easy to know who is listening except for some analytics the website offers… but I genuinely don’t understand them… so I’ve given up looking… We’re all more than statistics anyway… or at least we should be… which sort of speaks into the story today…

Thanks also for the willingness to journey through some of the well known stories of the bible… that we have been brought up with, yet, with new ears, in a new context, hear them in a quite different way.

It is the way of the bible to challenge and annoy what we’ve come to live with in the world… and forces us to hear God, and engage with love in a way that’s different from the old ‘norms’…

Of course it is the bread and butter of the faith to make us feel awkward, to be the corrective in our living in community, as neighbours, so today, lets go and take a keek into the goings-on of some vineyard somewhere, where the workers are just about to be paid. Only thing I know is first to get there, will end up being last.

**Gathering**

This space

between heaven and earth

Is as thin as breath

No more than a whisper

In such a place

We gather

With all who dare believe

We are not here on our own

But surrounded

by the echo

Of a thousand stories

of all who have journeyed

From waters edge

To mountainside

From a garden at dawn

To vineyard at the end of the day

Let us gather again

In the great echo of faith

That we may encounter

Here together

The love story

Of the great storyteller

God

**Prayer**

Let us turn our hearts and minds to God in prayer. Let us pray.

Gracious and generous God,

Compassionate and loving

We are drawn into your presence,

Into your love and forgiveness

Which surrounds us in all we do

As the summer season begins to shed its colours

We prepare to enter Autumn

Where creation and nature take on a different hue

A golden brown of sights and shapes

As indescribable as the words we use for you

Loving and generous God

In these places

In these times

We meet with you

Find comfort in your presence

And listen for your voice

May we find the space to forgive

And be forgiven

May we lay our anxieties and worries

Before you

And give thanks for all that you give us

Each and every day

And now hear us as we say the Lord’s Prayer together

Our Father, who is in heaven

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, and the power,

and the glory for ever. Amen

**Scripture Background**

Today’s reading seems fairly straightforward at the start. It is not until you get nearer to the end that it becomes more complicated. A vineyard owner goes out at different times of the day, beginning at 9.00am, hiring workers from the marketplace, to work on his land. The owner offers each worker the usual daily wage, one denarius. At 5.00pm the landowner goes back to the marketplace once more and hires the workers who are still waiting; the ones who everyone else had rejected. This group only work for one hour.

At the end of the day the ones hired last are paid first, the full amount, one denarius; the same as those who have worked all day. Needless to say, this does not go down well with the workers who have been there longer. But if we think back to last week’s reading about forgiveness and the servant who still expected to get his money back, there is a bit of a theme. Expectations, grace, generosity, compassion. It is all in this story. Because without work, the workers would not have been able to look after and feed their families. The last will be first, and the first will be last.

**Scripture Reading (Mike and Rosemary Broad)**

“The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. **2**He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard. **3**He went out again to the marketplace at nine o'clock and saw some men standing there doing nothing, **4**so he told them, ‘You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage.’ **5**So they went. Then at twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. **6**It was nearly five o'clock when he went to the marketplace and saw some other men still standing there. ‘Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?’ he asked them. **7**‘No one hired us,’ they answered. ‘Well, then, you go and work in the vineyard,’ he told them.

**8**“When evening came, the owner told his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with those who were hired last and ending with those who were hired first.’ **9**The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. **10**So when the men who were the first to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more; but they too were given a silver coin each. **11**They took their money and started grumbling against the employer. **12**‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun—yet you paid them the same as you paid us!’ **13**‘Listen, friend,’ the owner answered one of them, ‘I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. **14**Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. **15**Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?’”

**16**And Jesus concluded, “So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last.”

**Reflection**

I don’t know about you but when you find yourself in a different context… all these well known bible stories come alive in a new way and ask awkward questions of us.

The bible throws up stories right in the middle of a pandemic… that says… here you go… try this one on for size… and see where it takes you…

But in truth, I don’t know how best to do that with the workers in the vineyard…

With most parables, we place ourselves somewhere in them… and usually place ourselves in the shoes of the righteous… The Good Samaritan, the prodigal… but with this parable who is the righteous?… The owner?… the hirer?… the worker?…

Who is God in this story?… The owner of the vineyard?… Really?… Think about it… it may seem kind of obvious… but Jesus doesn’t say that… We just imply it… We always have this impulse to make God the most privileged character in the story… Why?… That’s reinterpreting the parable through our western culture…

And we do it all the time… yet the landowner… is often the last person you imagine to be God… think of the wedding feast… or the parable of the tenants… or the landowner with the two sons… Heaven forbid that the wealthy, powerful, landowner is God… the one who kills… divides and casts out…

We have a culture attracted to the powerful… but that’s not how to hear this story… The parable starts… the kingdom of God is like a landowner… and we stop there… but what is says is… the kingdom of God is like a landowner who then… and then… and then… It is not the person… but that activity… that is like the kingdom…

But this landowner… gives everyone the same wage… So they all go home simply realising the huge gulf between them… who have been played… by the landowner… who played them… Where’s the justice… nothing has changed… they are the poor and the wealthy landowner does what he wants with them… and they all end up divided and arguing… and the next day… no one is any better off… That’s not kingdom justice…

This is a reality parable… It exposes how the world works… And it’s true… Look at the whole vaccine debacle of the west against the south… or the huge rise in foodbanks… where extreme poverty will double by Christmas in the UK…

It is a parable that opens our eyes to the way the world is… It’s hard to admit the bible does that to us…

But it does… and it does something else… it puts us in the parable… either as the landless… or the landowner… and invites us to reimagine our world from the other’s point of view… It offers us a truth for our time…. It says to us: reframe the world… There will be no justice until you experience the world in the shoes of the opposite character to the one you imagine yourselves to be…

So as we are attempting to grow a society that has learned some of the lessons exposed in a pandemic… we can only do that justly… if we wear another’s shoes… if we hear the story from the point of view of the other characters… that’s how to write rules and policy that shape communities…

But to counter that… there is another reading… where justice IS served… but it is completely different from the justice the world serves…

The wage earned is actually irrelevant… that just opens the door to a bigger point… justice is not something you earn… like a reward… Justice is unconditional… It is a kingdom initiative… grace is something you don’t earn… it is unconditional… fairness is something you don’t earn… it is unconditional…

Or at least that’s the kingdom vision… That’s how God shapes the kingdom to work… Again a lesson for us as we restructure church and community…

We’ve seen how privilege does count… but in the kingdom of God… you can’t earn these things… it is the default position of any decent society to receive justice unconditionally and not only if you can afford it… to live in grace… to be offered fairness… to be loved equally… These are default positions in the kingdom…

So shift the balance… let’s not see God as the landowner… That’s not how the least in the world read this… only the privileged… Put ourselves in another shoes… and when the world feels different… when we have to earn the things God says should be unconditional for a decent society… then we have hope… and the bible has challenged us… to dare change the story of the world…

**Prayer**

Loving God, in this time, we find a space to remember those in need, those who are always last in this earthly world, and for whom grace, compassion, justice, and forgiveness can just be words without meaning.

In a time when there seems to be more wrong than right in our divided world, we remember those caught up in the heaviness and sadness of life.

We remember all refugees around the world who have no safe place to call home, no warm place to sleep and rest, and no daily wage to buy food for families. Today, we pray for those on the island of Lesbos where a fire has destroyed their camp and what little they had with them. For the people who risk their lives in order to find that safe haven, may the governments of the world unite to help, feed, support rather than apportion blame to those who have least and are treated unjustly and without compassion.

For the fires that are ravaging the East coast of the USA, may we pray for all those affected, whose lives have been lost, homes destroyed, and families struggling to get news of relatives and friends. We pray for the firefighters and volunteers who are doing their best to bring the fires under control.

We remember all affected by Covid. Especially the countries without the resource of a national health service, where medicine and medical staff are pushed beyond their limit but still struggle on regardless. Where wealth is accumulated by a few, the poor and marginalised are yet again pushed to the edge. May we, as a society, which has more than it needs, pledge to help those with little.

Gracious and compassionate God, may we pray and be there for the broken, the ill, the bereaved, those who feel they have nothing to offer. Loving God, may we show them they are not alone, that your unbounded love transcends to all people, wherever they are, whomever they are.

And now, in our silence, we offer you the people who need our prayers – the named and unnamed. Loving God hear us in the silence. These are our prayers. Amen.

**Benediction**

May we find peace

Find justice

Find grace

Are unconditional

And may we unconditionally share them back

And the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Love of God

And the commonwealth of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all

Evermore

Amen

**Announcements**

Thank you for your company. It’s good to know I’m not doing this on my own. Or at least I hope amn’t… As I said I don’t check the statistics of who watches this.

We’re open always, online. [nkchurch.org.uk](http://nkchurch.org.uk) whenever you wish, and there you’l find all our zoom activities, daily prayer’s written each day, new psalms, plus Facebook and instagram and twitter. All there.

We’re also going to be picking up a bundle of new community activities, in response to this parable.

We’ll be continuing to worship online through YouTube, Podcast and phone line but also in the sanctuary where you can phone ahead to book a pew, by the Thursday night. If you leave you name we’ll phone you back to confirm on the Friday.

But again, thanks for being part of the community that is New Kilpatrick in whatever way you connect. Thanks to Jeanette Peel and Mike and Rosemary Broad who have shared the service and to George Kirkland who put the video together. When the churches-online oscars are handed out, he’ll get at least one.

Take care of yourselves, keep safe, wear a mask and see you soon.