

Leura Uniting Church Order of Service for 20th September 2020

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

This Christian congregation respectfully acknowledges the Darug and Gundungurra peoples as original owners, inhabitants and custodians of this land for millennia. We honour their descendants and their elders: past, present and emerging.

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Today's service is led by Mark Hillis; the Scripture readings are read by Iris Swan; and the Prayers of the People prepared by Carolyn Craig-Emilsen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever.

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
whose greatness is unsearchable. (From Psalm 145)

Together in Song Hymn 98 *We praise you, we worship you, O God* (verses 1,2 & 6)

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 16: 2-15

READER: Your word is a lamp to my feet

RESPONSE: **and a light for my path.** (Ps 119:105)

Matthew 20: 1—16

In this is the Gospel of the Lord:

Praise to Jesus Christ, the Word!

PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION & THANKSGIVING

Ever-living God, source of power and love,
all praise and glory belong to you,
accept our worship to the praise and glory of your being,
Parent, brother, Spirit of grace.

In Christ Jesus you have called us to share in your attributes,
to nurture and care for the lives of one another and the life of this planet.
We confess today anything which falls short of your intentions and our own holy expectations. *We confess those times when our discipleship has been lazy; when we have been afraid of what others think; when we have missed opportunities to do good or prevent evil; and when we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.*

Merciful God, we know that you love and forgive us. Let us believe in that and act upon it, in Christ's name.

We thank you for the wonderfully enduring beauty of this world;
We thank you for the diversity of humanity - culture, customs and languages and for all we can learn from each other;

We thank you for all opportunities to care and to serve.

Unite us, in Christ, we pray, in love and in service, so that the whole earth may reclaim its hope and its glory. In the name of Jesus we pray, AMEN.

[*ending with the following words from Psalm 145*]

One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.

On the greatness of your being,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

A few moments of meditative silence

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

*Gracious God, forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us*

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory
Are yours, now and forever, AMEN.**

SHARING THE WORD

Deserving More?

Matthew 20: 1-16 & Exodus 16:2-15

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.... When these words begin a parable of Jesus we may start transposing our own value system onto the story. The parables can shock us because we don't always find our values reflected in them.



Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard [Codex aureus Eptemacensis]

I can easily imagine the heightened expectation of the workers who started early. When they saw the denarius which they had been promised handed to each of the men who came to work at the last hour, they wondered: *If they are getting a denarius for such a short time, what will we receive?* Yet they were paid exactly the same amount. What a let-down! Naturally, they complained. They felt strongly that they deserved more.

Although the world of commerce demonstrates how easily Australians are drawn to 'special, exclusive offers,' fairness is something which we are thought to value very highly. Clearly, the landowner in this parable does not behave fairly: because he pays the same amount in wages for the day to all the workers, regardless of their starting time. [Below is a Rembrandt Sketch about the Parable.]

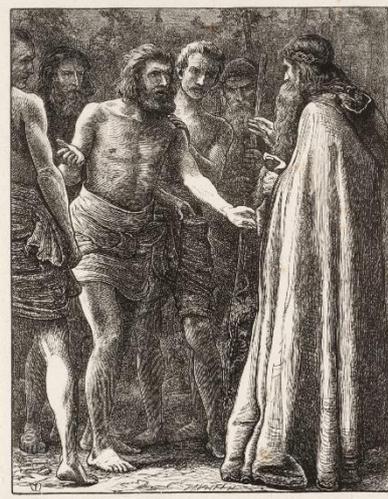


How does the landowner respond? Let's look at his words in verse 15: In literal translation the landowner says, *"Am I not allowed to do what I wish with my own property? Or is your eye evil, because I am good?"* Have you heard of the "evil eye"? You may know that the symbol of the "evil eye" is often used to decorate vehicles and property across the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. It can also be worn like jewelry. It is used as a talisman

to ward-off bad ‘vibes.’ The “evil eye” is one which looks with malice or envy on the supposed good fortune of others. It is informative to see these words used instead of the common translation, “*Are you jealous because I am generous?*”

The parable is really about a different economy than the one with which we are accustomed. That economy is God’s realm of inclusive values, where people find joy and satisfaction in serving for its own sake, not expecting to be constantly compared with others. That economy is one where people rejoice in the good fortune of others, and either indulge in acts of generosity towards others or, at least, look kindly upon those who do act generously. Let’s consider what it means to live in such a realm.

There are helpful connections with the Exodus chapter 16 reading: in that we see the people of Israel complaining about conditions and their want of more. We also notice God’s intention that the *manna* is enough for each day: and as a food, it cannot be stockpiled. There is no point in wanting more, let alone deserving it. There is simply enough for each day.



There are also very helpful connections with the rest of Matthew and the Gospel teaching about forgiveness. The scholar Charlotte Cleghorn tells us a story from church council records in sixteenth-century Switzerland: *Asked to repeat the Lord’s Prayer, a man pretended he did not know it, because he knew that if he said it he would have to forgive the merchant who cheated him—and that was something he had no intention of doing!*¹

In the light of today’s parable, then, should we hesitate before praying these words from the Lord’s Prayer: **“Give us this day our daily bread”** or **“Give us the bread we need for today”**? The question is not “do I deserve more?” but “How much do I really need?”

[Above: *The Labourers in the Vineyard*, by J.E. Millais, 1864]

Some questions for your consideration

1. What impresses you about the parable of the workers in the vineyard?
2. Who are the most sympathetic characters in the story in your opinion?
3. How may a story like this help shape a community’s values?
4. How might you re-tell this story to someone else?

Together in Song Hymn 610 *What does the Lord require?* (verses 1,2,3 & 5)

SHARING NOTICES, WITH JOHN COX

Our attention is also drawn to the fact that tomorrow is United Nations International Day of Peace. There will be an RSVP event in Civic Place, Katoomba, called by the Blue Mountains Interfaith Group. The contact ‘phone numbers are 0412 729 088 or 0408 448 739.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

CAROLYN: *When I say “Lord in your compassion, hear our prayer” I will leave a few seconds silence. I invite you during that time to repeat the words “Hear our prayer” in silence to yourselves in your hearts.*

Lord, we hold before you the pain of our world

In these times of the COVID-19 pandemic and global upheaval,
For those suffering everywhere, especially those who have little

¹ Cleghorn, Charlotte. D. (2011). Pastoral Perspective on Matthew 18:21–35. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A* (Vol. 4, p. 72). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

food, shelter and medical support in refugee camps like Lesbos and Syria and others, and where infections are high, in India, Israel, Indonesia, UK, Europe and the USA.

Lord in your compassion, hear our prayer (A few seconds for silent prayer).

We pray for our Federal and State political leaders and public health officials for wisdom, tolerance and thoughtful communication as they make decisions, for all those doctors, nurses, health and community worker at the front line for families, HSC students, those living alone, those who are homeless , or suffering anxiety, mental illness or domestic violence or separation from loved ones.

Lord in your compassion, hear our prayer (A few seconds silent prayer).

We give thanks for our leaders and workers here in the Blue Mountains, for our political representatives, Susan Templeman and Trish Doyle, for concerns here in our Blue Mountain communities about the possible spread of COVID -19 and for everyone in schools, hospitals and businesses coping with pressures at this time.

Lord in your compassion, hear our prayer (A few seconds of silent prayer).

We hold before you our Uniting Churches up and down the mountains especially at Blackheath, Katoomba and Leura that we may support each other. We ask for your blessing for our services, all our activities of our Church including Junction 142 and our ability to sustain each other pastorally and spiritually.

Lord in your compassion, hear our prayer (A few seconds for silent prayer).

We pray at this time for those members of our own church community named in the **Bulletin** and for all those unnamed in our own community and beyond who are in our hearts at this time.

Lord in your compassion, hear our prayer. (A few seconds silence)

As I say The Lord's Prayer, I invite you to quietly say it to yourselves at the same time.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.

For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

OFFERINGS AND DEDICATION

We acknowledge all offerings made to the glory of God with thankful hearts.

Together in Song Hymn 717 Give thanks with a grateful heart



BENEDICTION

The grace of Christ attend you;
the love of God surround you;
the Holy Spirit keep you;
this day and forever. AMEN