

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS 20TH SEPTEMBER 2020**

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also, with you.

Acknowledgement:

Call to Worship:

Welcome into the presence of a wildly generous God who loves all, exercises grace lavishly and offers hope for a future we cannot even begin to imagine.

As we worship let us raise our voices in praise. Let our hearts rejoice at the extravagance of our Creator.

Hymn: 154 (TiS) 'Great is your faithfulness'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Lord we cannot help but give thanks for the generosity you have shown to your people throughout the ages. From the beginning you have provided for your people, even giving bread and meat in the wilderness to physically sustain your people.

We give thanks that you hear the cries of your people and you respond.

We acknowledge that we do not always understand what you are giving to us. When your generosity comes in unexpected forms, we often fail to recognise it.

We experience your blessing on our lives, yet we covet this to ourselves, not letting the abundance overflow into the entire world that all may be blessed.

Help us to become a source of grace and generosity to others and to all creation, that your love and care may be shown.

Merciful God forgive us for our little faith, and our selfish grasping; forgive us for our failure to understand that your blessings are meant to be a blessing for others. Teach us to be always awake for your coming to us in others and to embrace and invite you into our homes, our country and our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness:

In grace we are forgiven. We are loved, forgiven and blessed.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn: 166 (TiS) 'Sing a new song'.

Reading: Mathew 20: 1-16

Message: 'Labourers in the vineyard'.

I wonder what comes to your mind when you hear stories like this parable from the gospel of Mathew?

The parable of workers who worked hard all day long in the hot sun and got paid the same day's wage as those who only worked for one hour?

I assume that this is not Jesus' more favourable and popular parables. It is the kind of story that makes for a long conversation but practically almost impossible to see in our day and age. Because the parable is against one of our most cherished values, the value of hard work and fair pay or just reward.

I don't think you'd disagree with that kind of value. It is almost always expected that the more you work, the more productive you are and therefore ought to be rewarded for it.

If we look closely at the parable, the landowner hired workers early in the morning and promised them that he would pay them an agreed amount – one denarius, the equivalent of the minimum wage in those days. Then the landowner went back and hired more workers. Some were hired from nine o'clock; some were hired from noon and others were hired from five o'clock with the promise that they would all be paid the right amount.

Now, some of us may have already worked out that the right amount for those who were hired later on the day would be paid a pro-rata share of the one denarius. That would seem fair and be the right reward for starting late in the day.

But the parable took an unexpected turn when the workers came for their pay at the end of the day, the landowner paid all the workers the same amount – one denarius. Something is not right here...it was hard for the early starters to accept that they are being paid the same amount as those who started late.

Those who started early, when they saw that they were being paid the same amount as those who started late complained to the landowner. To which the landowner replied, "Don't I have the right to do whatever I want with my money? Are you envious because I am generous? Take your pay and go home."

This parable teaches us the difference between human being kind of fairness and God's justice. The early starters were paid the amount that they were promised so there's nothing wrong there. The problem is when they saw that the others were paid the same amount as them.

We often say that we only want to be paid what we deserve. We would like just compensation for the work we put in, but the workers were paid their dues. The problem was when they saw that the generous landowner was paying the others the same as them.

This parable overturns our conventional economic thinking as people are rewarded both for what was promised and what is enough for their existence, which depends entirely on the generosity of the landowner.

The kingdom of God is built and sustain through the generosity of God and God's abundant grace. In that kingdom of God, we are given what we need and justly gifted according to God's promise.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard asks us to reflect on our motivation of being and serving in God's kingdom here on earth.

We must be grateful being in God's vineyard in the first place, we must be graceful in rejoicing that those who joined us late are given the same as us...

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Notices/Joys and concerns:

Offering:

Prayers of the People: *'Balancing the Scales'*

In the times when we give – however generously it becomes blatantly clear, O God, how ridiculous our attempts are to balance the scales; We cannot repay your abundance of supply, your extravagance of grace; nor do you require it.

So, why should we expect it of others? In truth, we cannot. Like you we can only love – by giving, by serving, by praying.

And so, we ask...

Free the score – keepers in our world and in our hearts.

Restore the fallen in our world and in our hearts.

Strengthen the merciful in our world and in our hearts.

Heal the broken in our world and in our hearts. Uplift the lowly in our world and in our hearts.

Bring down the tyrants in our world and in our hearts.

Erase the lines of division in our world and in our hearts.

Create a Christ – guided community in our world and in our hearts.

And use us to make it so.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.** (From Sacredise)

Hymn: 690 (TiS) 'Beauty for brokenness'.

Blessing:

You have been blessed abundantly in ways you may not even recognise. Go into your communities, and into this beautiful world we have been given, love lavishly, give generously, and experience God anew in all you do.

And know that God goes with you, Christ Jesus holds you, and the Spirit helps your heart dance in delight as you live out the blessing of your faith each moment.

Amen.

715 (TiS) 'Everything that has breath'.

*Parts of this service is an adaptation of the worship resource offered by the WA justice unit.