

25th Sunday of the Year A

First Reading Isaiah 55:6-9

Seek the Lord while he is still to be found, call to him while he is still near.

Let the wicked man abandon his way, the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn back to the Lord who will take pity on him, to our God who is rich in forgiving; for my thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways not your ways – it is the Lord who speaks. Yes, the heavens are as high above earth as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts.

Second Reading Philippians 1:20-24,27

Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death. Life to me, of course, is Christ, but then death would bring me something more; but then again, if living in this body means doing work which is having good results – I do not know what I should choose. I am caught in this dilemma: I want to be gone and be with Christ, which would be very much better, but for me to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need for your sake.

Avoid anything in your everyday lives that would be unworthy of the gospel of Christ.

Gospel Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard. Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, 'You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage.' So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same.

Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

He said to them, 'You go into my vineyard too.' In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first.' So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner. 'The men who came last' they said, 'have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat.' He answered one of them and said, 'My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last-comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?' Thus the last will be first, and the first, last."

Meditation

Unemployment is not a strictly modern phenomenon. In Jesus' day those who had no regular work went to the village marketplace every morning, hoping to find a day's labour in a landed man's fields or vineyards. It was a buyer's market. Day labourers worked for whatever they were given. The basic premise of Jesus' story, then, was as familiar to his first hearers as it is to us today.

The story's sting is in its tail. The logic of human justice requires that those who work a full day receive a full day's wage, while those who work one hour receive one hour's pay. It is not so in the kingdom of God. Those who have laboured in the ways of righteousness from early morning receive their full reward. But the prostitutes and tax collectors and sinners who arrive at the eleventh hour receive no less. The laws of human justice are workable enough under ordinary circumstances, but, as the prophet Isaiah suggests, they are too narrow to contain the always astonishing love of God. The Church is the servant of the kingdom of God, bound by the kingdom's laws. We are commanded to invite to supper not only those who have earned a place by their long fidelity but also all those who have just arrived at the gate. The good and the respectable may grumble a bit to find themselves cheek-by-jowl at the Lord's table with sinners. But the host asks, "I am free to do as I please ... am I not? Or are you envious because I am generous?"