

Sometimes we think to ourselves: if we could just see God
Then we could believe that he is real: then we could live
As people who have God at the centre of our lives.
But truly seeing God is not simply a matter of looking with our eyes.
Today I'm proclaiming good news,
And that is as we receive Jesus' parable, God gives us true sight:
He gives the eye to see that he is not simply *just* or *fair*,
But that he is *good*, that he is *generous*.
It's through his word that God puts himself at the centre of our lives
And frees us to be people who are generous with each other.

There's a backstory to today's parable.
It's the rich young man coming to Jesus
Here's how it starts: **Then someone came to [Jesus] and said, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good...**
Keep your ears attuned to this word 'good'
It's going to come up in today's parable,
Hidden under the word 'generous' -we'll get to that.

Jesus ends up telling the rich young man
That if he wants to be perfect, to be complete,
Then he should sell all that he has, give it to the poor,
And follow him.
But, as I'm sure you remember, the young man goes away grieving.

Jesus then gives teaching about how hard it is
For a rich person to enter God's kingdom,
Finally saying **'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.'**

Now let's take it from there: **Then Peter said in reply, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?'**
What do you think Jesus will say?
'Stop thinking about what you can get from God, Peter!
Don't you understand that God
Does not deal in rewards to human beings?'
Not all. Listen: **Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed**

me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.

They will get great honour, a hundredfold return on the investment.

God will, that is, pay a handsome return on

All that is invested in his kingdom.

This is consonant with the teaching that Jesus has been giving

From the sermon on the mount onwards,

And it's also consonant with the teaching that St Paul gives

In his letters to the early Christian communities.

So, we should understand that God will deal *justly* with us,

That he will pay us back according to his word.

But at the end of this teaching, Jesus says these cryptic words:

But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

And then he tells today's parable.

Listen to how it starts: **'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.**

We are in the world of labour relations:

Of a boss hiring workers to gather in the harvest.

After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

The boss and the workers strike an agreement.

The usually daily wage: in the Greek: a denarius: an exact amount.

OK. Listen to how it goes on: **When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went.**

Again, an agreement is struck: but did you notice the difference?

No exact amount is agreed upon: what is right, just, fair.

This is then repeated: **When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.**

Again, not set amount: what is just.

Then there's a change: **And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard."**

Did you notice the difference in detail there?

No guarantee to payment: just a command to go and work.

Perhaps it's simply for the dignity of finally being chosen,
And of doing something rather than nothing.

It's what happens at the end that is surprising: **When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.**

They received, the Greek text specifies, a denarius:

The exact amount guaranteed to those who were hired first.

Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.

Had they suffered an injustice? Had the boss broken his word?

No. But how do they feel?

Listen: **And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."**

This is understandable from a human point of view:

We spend much of our time comparing ourselves with others,

And from childhood on we are sensitive to anything that seems unjust.

Here there is also the aspect of a shared grievance:

That in grumbling together they strengthen their case:

But listen to how the parable goes on: **But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go;**

First the landowner deals with them not as a group,

But personally: he does not hide behind his manager

And he does speak to an individual from the group.

He restates their agreement

And reminds them that they are being dealt with

Fairly according to the terms of their employment.

He does not get angry with them,

But encourages them to take the pay they have rightly earned.

But then he says these words: **I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?**

He will not act unjustly: he will not give less than is earned,

But he chooses not to be just *just*, but to be *generous*.

And then he asks this question: **Or are you envious because I am generous?"**

Literally: *is your eye evil because I am good?*

Remember: according to Jesus, who is good?

God alone. It is God asking us this question.

But what's going on with this eye business?

Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, in the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus says these words: **'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!'** Matthew 6:22-23

And today's parable can help us understand what he is talking about.

If we deal with God only according to his justice,

We will not see God; worse we will give him the evil eye.

If we resent God because of his generosity to others

We will not see God, our whole body will be full of darkness.

Here we understand that seeing God is not a physical act

So much as a disposition to the divine.

Do we want justice, justice, justice, from God

Or will we receive him according to his generosity, his mercy?

Do we want to give God the evil eye?

Or will we see God with the eye that gives light to the body?

Just sums up his parable with the same words

That were there at the beginning: **So the last will be first, and the first will be last.**

And this reminds us that Jesus, the one who told this parable,

The one who spoke of the goodness of God,

Became the last of all and the servant of all.

On the cross he took on the justice of God,

And showed us what we truly deserve according to our sin,

But in doing so, showed also the *goodness*, the *generosity* of God,

Who chooses to show mercy in forgiving sin,

And in freeing us to be people who share the goodness of God

With others.

Christ took up his cross for you,

He suffered for you,

And he lives and reigns for you,

He is giving you the eye to see God in his generosity,

So that your body will be filled with his light,

A light that will shine before others

And glorify the Father. In Jesus' name. Amen.