



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2026 – Trinity 16

COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers
of your people who call upon you;
and grant that they may both perceive and know
what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 145. 1-8

- 1 I will exalt you, O God my King, ♦
and bless your name for ever and ever.
- 2 Every day will I bless you ♦
and praise your name for ever and ever.
- 3 Great is the Lord and highly to be praised; ♦
his greatness is beyond all searching out.
- 4 One generation shall praise your works to another ♦
and declare your mighty acts.
- 5 They shall speak of the majesty of your glory, ♦
and I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
- 6 They shall speak of the might of your marvellous acts, ♦
and I will also tell of your greatness.
- 7 They shall pour forth the story of your abundant kindness ♦
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
- 8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, ♦
long-suffering and of great goodness.

A reading from the letter to the Philippians, chapter 1, verses 21-30.

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from Matthew, chapter 20, verses 1-16.

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel. Everywhere except Fitz introduces it with an Acclamation (the blue bit), and then we all use the introduction and ending (the green bit):

Alleluia. **Alleluia.**

I am the way, the truth and the life, says the Lord. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 20, verses 1-16.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

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. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. 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."

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

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; 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? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

A Reflection from Dave

“It’s not fair!” It’s the cry of young children, football fans and stropky teenagers alike, because if the British intolerance to queue-jumping tells us anything, we live in a society which prides itself on “fair play.” Exams at school promote fairness through meritocracy, basing advancement on individual talent and hard work. Democracy seeks fairness through the rights of individuals to an equal voice and opportunity to influence political decisions - even if the current debate surrounding the influence behind large political donations highlights how money can also be used to buy the loudest voice. Ultimately what we want is for things to be fair.

Which seemingly puts us at odds with our Gospel reading, where Jesus’ parable about the upside-down Kingdom of God concludes with the famous line, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” The last being first might seem a good aspiration, but against the reality of our merit-based, rights-focused society, the first finding themselves suddenly last can feel desperately unfair.

At first, Jesus’ parable seems to present a fair deal: a vineyard owner offers his punctual labourers a day’s wages for a day’s work. But they are joined mid-morning by late-comers from the marketplace, with more clock on at lunchtime, mid afternoon, and just before home-time. Yet this vineyard owner seems not to have heard of the term, “pro-rata.” There is no proportional payment - everyone gets paid the same, much to the disgust of the original labourers: “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us!” In other words, “It’s not fair!”

Yet Jesus tells this parable to provide a different story to the one we often tell ourselves. To grumble that “it’s not fair” for God to give others more than they deserve whilst we get less misses the point. It’s not fair that as sinners God fails to treat us as our sins deserve, and it’s not fair that our proudest heights and most shameful depths change nothing about how much God loves us. Where meritocracy gets us defining ourselves by our own capabilities, and democracy by our own rights, in the Kingdom of God we are defined instead by God’s character. The very things that advance us towards first in our society, lose their value in God’s Kingdom - “the first will be last!”

Yet, like the vineyard owner, God says “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” God’s character is not limited to managing things fairly, but is revealed as he shares himself generously and indiscriminately. Whether we come to God early or late, diligently or haphazardly, we receive the same abundant grace in Jesus Christ. We become both recipients of God’s generosity, and those who belong to God, to be used generously as he chooses. Let us be able to say with Paul in our Philippians reading, “to live is Christ, to die is gain,” as he makes even the greatest diminishment - that of death - a means to a greater gain.

The Kingdom of God may be upside-down and counter-cultural, but thanks be to God that when all is said and done, “the last will be first!”