



Twenty-fifth Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

Isaiah 55: 6-9 Philippians 1: 20-27 Matthew 20: 1-16

The brief extract from the prophet Isaiah is from a beautiful poem celebrating the call to live a graced life. It is one of the most familiar of the poems of Isaiah. "Come to the water..."

We are called to seek the Lord. To be active in our desire to know what God calls us to. However we are warned, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways." says the Lord.

We do not know the mind of God except in a very general way. In fact we need to be wary of those who claim to know the mind of God. There are those who believe that they can do violence to others in the name of God. This violence isn't always physical; a lot of damage is done by people who try to curb the freedom of others.

There are some aspects of the vision of God that we can be fairly sure of, that violence is evil, or that we are to be guardians of the planet.

After a period of prayer and discernment I may feel peaceful about a decision I have made, or after a crisis I may be able to go forward, trusting in God but I cannot tell another person what is the *will of God* for them.

In the Gospel today, Jesus tells a story which reverses the expectations we have about worth. Today a lot of people are concerned about their jobs and their security. People working together keep an eye out for what others are earning. We expect to be paid according to what we do.

This story could be called *The Good Employer*. It falls into two scenes. The first part describes the way in which the workers are hired. We don't know why the farmer didn't take on a full staff in the morning but just that at different times during the day.

The second scene is set at evening when the wages were being paid. Each worker had been contracted for a day's wage. The wage clerk beginning with the last began the pay out. According to justice they should have received a fraction of the wage according to the number of hours worked. To their surprise and delight they got the full amount. As the pay line got shorter the expectations of the first in the field rose. They saw a bonus coming up. However when their turn came they received the same amount. The workers became very critical of the employer. In fact they accused him of being unfair.

Let's go back to the beginning of the story. It starts, "The kingdom of God is like..." This story is told to help us understand how kingdom people live.

Discipleship is a gift. We don't earn it.
Discipleship is not bestowed because of talent or long service.
Discipleship gives us no claims on God.

We can't say "I've given the best years of my life to God, God owes me."
We can't even claim to have a special call.
If the Scripture tells us anything it is that God can use people from a variety of backgrounds, races, the talented, the untalented to act on God's behalf. All this is required is an openness to the movement of the Spirit acting in the world for peace and justice.

Moses thought that his stutter would disqualify him in any debate with the powerful. God didn't think so.
Zacchaeus thought that being dodgy in his dealing with people would disqualify him. Jesus didn't think so.
The Syro-Phoenician woman argued the point with Jesus to get him to listen. Jesus listened and the girl was cured.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways."
We can say, "Thank God."
In this story the qualities of mercy and justice are finely balanced. The employer treated the early workers justly and to the latecomers he showed mercy and compassion.

This parable is for us who follow Jesus.
Do I believe that church goers are worth more than non church goers?
Do I believe that heterosexual people are worth more than homosexual people?
Do I believe that married people are worth more than divorced people?
Do I believe that Catholics are worth more than Muslims?
Do I think that I can decide who is beyond the love of God?

"Seek the Lord where he **is** to be found" not where we think God **should** be found.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.