

**Bible reading Matthew 20:1-16**

**When God's justice seems unfair**

Jesus tells a parable about the owner of a vineyard. The owner is concerned to hire as many workers as possible, all through the day, and then pays all his workers the same, irrespective of when they started work. The kingdom of heaven is like this; no one gets more or less than anyone else, everyone belongs and receives in equal measure.



**Bible notes**



In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells a number of parables about the kingdom of heaven (known in Mark's and Luke's Gospels as the kingdom of God). Each uses a different image to help its hearers understand a different aspect of God's character or behaviour, or of what life is like in the kingdom. This parable, of the labourers in the vineyard, follows on from the story of the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-30) in which it is noted that it is hard for those who have much to enter the kingdom of heaven. They make for a divided focus whereas, as observed elsewhere in this week's readings, it's all about Jesus.

In this parable, it is the generosity of God, as portrayed by the landowner, that highlights a different approach to wealth. Those employed last receive a day's wage, hugely generous for their single hour's work. All the other workers receive the same, even those who have worked a 12-hour day. In a context of widespread unemployment this generosity is life changing. In the context of the preceding story, it demonstrates how a focus on money, even when understandable in the circumstances, can distract from a focus on what really matters. As in God's response to Jonah, which is similar to the landowner's response to one of the grumblers, there is a reminder here that God is free to make decisions without fitting into the framework of what, to us, seems fair. Outrageous grace gives what we do not deserve and does so with abundance. The final challenging sentence, 'the last will be first, and the first will be last', appeared at the end of the preceding story and reinforces this message. God's take on things often involves different priorities and turns our expectations upside-down.

**First impressions**

- When have you thought or said, 'That's just not fair'.
- Does God's justice sometimes seem unfair – why/how?
- How does God's grace reveal itself in your life?



**LISTEN**

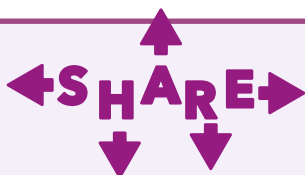


Play 'Blinded by Your Grace' by Stormzy

Think about how God's outrageous love and grace help us understand the parable and perhaps helps us to see things differently in terms of justice and fairness.

**LOOK**

Find an interesting view. What can you see? Now look through a cardboard tube. What do you notice? Try some binoculars. Climb a tree or stand on the stepladder. You haven't moved far, but did you see something new? Which views are most like God's?



Make and share some treats like cake or biscuits. Make sure you give the other person a larger portion than you keep for yourself. Think about God's generosity, as you enjoy it together.

**Pray** 

Just and generous God,  
help me to live generously,  
to treat everyone fairly,  
even when others may not do the same to me –  
because I know that is what Jesus would do. Amen.

**ACT** 

What can you do to stop injustice? Get involved in a campaign locally or explore websites like Tearfund, Christian Aid, Oxfam, the Fairtrade Foundation and Change.org to lend your voice and speak up for justice.