

Coop's Scoops # 104, Sunday September 20th, 2020

If you live alone, please imagine someone else from St. Thomas reading these same words alongside of you, and feel “together” in the presence of God even though we remain apart at this time. If you don't live alone.....you already have a “together”, God be praised!

Sentence:

Open our hearts, Lord, to give heed to what is said by your Son.

Collect: Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth, and ourselves in your image. Teach us to discern your hand in all your works and to serve you with reverence and thksgiving; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Hoy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings:

Exodus 32: 1-14

Psalm 106: 7-8, 19-23

Philippians 1: 21-27

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 20: 1-16

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius^[a] for the day and sent them



into his vineyard. ³ “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long

doing nothing?’⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

⁹ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Sermon: This third Sunday in September is generally Harvest Thanksgiving. It is a special time when the Church remembers to pray for farmers, and distributors and processors and agricultural science...and to give thanks to God for the season that has resulted in the growth of food crops. Picture how the church looks with pumpkins and vegetables and fruit displayed, and with fresh bread on the Altar. Can you almost taste the crunch, the savoury and the sweet. All of those items needed land to grow in, and someone to plant, to tend, and to harvest. Farmers are among the hardest working, most productive and often least well paid people in our entire working population. Yet without them, without food, it doesn’t really matter if you have an i-phone or a graduate degree or a red convertible. Food and water are the great levellers. Without them we all die, with them we flourish. We owe honour and respect as well as gratitude to those who farm the land.

In our Gospel reading we get a picture of farming in the time of Jesus. The landowner is growing grapes and it's time to get them off the vines. He needs extra people to complete the work already done by himself and his regular crew. He goes down to what we used to call the Local Manpower Day Labour Pool and hires the best men he can find. Later in the day, he realizes more are needed...he returns at noon and three and five o'clock in the afternoon. Now by five, the only people left hoping for work at that late hour are the truly desperate and the truly weak, muddled or afflicted. They had not been chosen by anyone throughout the day that they waited. That is their usual experience. The landowner sets them all to work. In the evening, it's time to get your pay and head home. Oddly, the landowner he releases those who came late first. And even more oddly, he gives them a full day's wages. I can just see the sparkle in the eyes of those last-hired who never ever ever got a full day's wage. They can go home proud and happy with enough money to buy food for several days at least. The wives and kids would be so excited. The men who had worked a full 12 hours in the broiling heat got paid last, and understandably they expected to get more pay than the fellows who had only worked one hour. Yes, they received the wage that had agreed to, but no longer felt proud or happy or joyful in that day's wage. So they grumbled and complained to the land owner. And the landowner, calling them friends, replies that he was just being generous. Just choosing to do what he wanted with his own money. And hearing that, we can agree, "well...sure"...and yet a part of us agrees with that those who work harder and longer should get paid more, and should be the first to be paid. It doesn't seem fair. And it also doesn't seem very smart. Because if the landowner does this more than once, he will find that no one will come to work his vineyard until 5 o'clock. It's just human nature. We are now called to ponder what this parable about the Kingdom of God really means.

Last year at the Bracebridge Fall Fair I had one of those moments of insight that sticks with you. Fall Fairs for little kids are mostly about the midway. It takes Gregory and Claire at least a half dozen rides before they are remotely ready to look at animals and exhibits and prize veggies and flowers. The line ups in the midway are often long. Let me tell you, when this granny is in line with her two grandkids, I am a HAWK, eyeing the kids ahead of us. Nobody gets to butt in when I'm on guard. It's just not fair. If my kids have waited longer, they get to go first, before the latecomers drifting in from the sides. And just as I was sending a few kids to the end of the line, I remembered the "first and the last". Perhaps the Parable means that in God's Kingdom the ferris wheel or roller coaster would just get bigger and bigger and bigger so that everyone can get on at one time and there are no lineups. No first and last just everyone always. Perhaps it means that in God's Kingdom, mercy and love and generosity are so broad and deep and wide that everyone is welcome and everyone can come together and everyone receives exactly the same thing in the same amount because it is measureless: the grace of God. That fills my heart with thanksgiving for God's greatest blessing: mercy.

Perhaps you know the little song "Count your blessings, name them one by one". If we actually made a list of all the things that are good and beautiful in our lives it would be quite long. But it would be incomplete without expressing gratitude for the things we DON'T have in our lives. We all do suffer, and pain must never be glossed over, but none of us here this morning have to worry about dodging bullets when we leave the building. None of us have to agonize over whether we will be able to find water for our children today, or face actual death by starvation or genocide. Yet we have brothers and sisters, including Christian brothers and sisters, all over the world who do face these things day after day after day. How can we help?

Jesus taught us so much about generosity and about sharing in the simplest of words in the Lord's Prayer : Ask for what we (us) need (bread). For the day(daily). Believing that day by day, what we need we will receive. Notice it's about what we **NEED**, not what we **WANT**; and it's about **ONE DAY** not our entire future's needs x 10 stockpiled on shelves and in banks. If all Christians all over the world actually lived with more commitment to those words, there would be plenty to share: no need for anyone anywhere to go hungry, no need for anyone anywhere not to have medical care, and no need for any child anywhere to be sick and naked and hungry and alone. We could, in Jesus name, give up some of our wants in order that others could have some of their needs. In varying degrees, we all have something to share, and something we could sacrifice. A pipe dream? Paul didn't think so.

Paul assured the Corinthians that God blesses generosity. Hear the words again "You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God in those who receive. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly".

May God's Holy Spirit renew our minds and enlarge our hearts so that we grow to be more generous without condition, and with great joy. Amen.

(Blessings! I have to go do some self-examination now! – Judie+)

Prayer for Today: My Righteous God, you created us, male and female, in your image. Because we are made in your image, we are made to reflect your giving and generous nature. Therefore, we ask that you mold us to better reflect this image. Shape our hearts, minds, and souls that we might learn to give as freely as you give. For you are a God who holds nothing back but lays down even your own life for us. Amen. (from connectUS)

Blessing: For ourselves, and for others:

From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, of Thy goodness give us, with Thy love inspire us, by Thy Spirit guide us, by Thy power protect us, and in Thy mercy receive us, now and ever. By Thy goodness and through our hands, give them, by Thy power and through our hands, protect them; by Thy love expressed in human voice, inspire them; by Thy Spirit as we give forth Thy Word, guide them; and in Thy mercy receive them, now and ever. And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Sent with love from Judie+