

## Philippians 1:21-end

### Matthew 20:1-16

**Matthew 20:1-16** "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> He went out again to the marketplace at nine o'clock and saw some men standing there doing nothing, <sup>4</sup> so he told them, 'You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage.' <sup>5</sup> So they went. Then at twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> It was nearly five o'clock when he went to the marketplace and saw some other men still standing there. 'Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?' he asked them. <sup>7</sup> 'No one hired us,' they answered. 'Well, then, you go and work in the vineyard,' he told them.

<sup>8</sup> "When evening came, the owner told his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with those who were hired last and ending with those who were hired first.' <sup>9</sup> The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. <sup>10</sup> So when the men who were the first to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more; but they too were given a silver coin each. <sup>11</sup> They took their money and started grumbling against the employer. <sup>12</sup> 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun—yet you paid them the same as you paid us!' <sup>13</sup> 'Listen, friend,' the owner answered one of them, 'I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. <sup>14</sup> Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?'"

<sup>16</sup> And Jesus concluded, "So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last."

On holiday, in Wales, last week I watched a presentation from the Diocese, on Bryony's recommendation, looking at how we see church growth post Covid. It was headed up by Robin Gamble, who is the Bishop's advisor for growth.

I found the whole presentation engaging but was particularly motivated by two points. Actually, they merge into one point.

1. The need for relationship. How do we keep current relationships going during this time of waiting; and an understanding that the community life which the church offers is not for our benefit but for the benefit of others.
2. Pray intentionally for more people to attend a church service; to avoid the church going into maintenance mode and becoming insular. And how to make new people welcome when the prayer is answered.

It was the first part of the second point that I found really challenging, because I have always been adamant that

growth should be about spiritual understanding not about the number of bums on pews, or in our case chairs.

It was a simple comment that made me sit up – but then God usually speaks through simple comments – well, he does to me...make of that what you will !!

“Bums on pews are connected to souls”

Why have I never understood that before??

Where are the new bums to be found? Not in our church relationships. We must have a presence in the community. We need to ask ourselves how many non-church groups do we belong to? An easy one for me – none, absolutely none!! I hang my head in shame!! And of those of us who do belong to secular groups how many people in those groups know about our relationship with Jesus.

If we still work then our work place will be our place of Presence, or where we volunteer, or socialise. Wherever we find ourselves outside of the church building is a place where we offer the Presence of God.

How does that work? If we start banging on about what we get up to in church it's often met with a polite smile or an ill-concealed yawn.

Our motive for growth is to increase the number of people coming to church ( I admit I was wrong) but the reason for the motive is a zeal for souls, a desire to see people experience the fullness of life through Jesus.

If there is no belief in God, then this life is all that there is.

This, I suppose, goes some way towards our understanding of people's desire for status/wealth.

Those who understand the meaning of faith realise that this life is but one part of the eternal journey towards sharing the glory of God.

So, although status and wealth may go some way to making life more comfortable now, actually, it has no meaning whatsoever in the wider context of completeness of life, the meaning of life.

When we begin to seriously question the meaning of life we begin to realise that, actually, we need a reason for living.

When we are bereaved there can be an emptiness when we are tempted to think there is nothing left for us, but this space where a loved one used to be. Eventually, we begin to understand that whilst we have lost, for the moment, something good and special we are still part of life here on earth and so we begin to reach out and find other reasons to get up in the morning.

If our purpose for living is simply to achieve more success, status, wealth, then sadly we are missing out on the real meaning of life.

The meaning of life begins with, is filled with and ends with love. "God so loved the world."

I was asked recently, a very good question, I was asked if I believed that God was the source of love that prompted or encouraged people to serve those in need

I do believe that.

The question was, what if the person in question does not believe in God but believes the prompts come from another source? Good question?

That will teach me to open my mouth.

But it made me think, if that was the case what would that other source be?

I guess you could say that some people are naturally generous, self-giving people and that they don't have to believe in God.

I would agree; however, God believes in them.

We don't have to believe in God to be used by him in acts of love – but when we do believe the act becomes a relational thing between us and Him.

When we believe, then we experience the fullness of life Jesus spoke about. Knowing God living within us by his Holy Spirit means that in giving to others we receive from him.

1 John 4 from the Message translation.

My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God *is* love—so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God.

My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us—perfect love.

**God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us.**

And the “each other” doesn’t just mean those of us who worship together, it means everyone who God loves, even the ones who annoy us.

And this, to me, is the message that evangelism is all about.

It’s not about banging on to people about their sin, It’s about salvation and when that happens we don’t need someone else condemning us, because we gradually become aware of our sin and the need to say sorry.

In Matthew’s gospel reading we hear about the Parable of the Vineyard Workers.

This parable is about grace.

It reminds us that when we welcome all these new people we are praying for to our church building, there will be those among them who have not as yet come to belief. Bums on pews are connected to souls.

God will not differentiate between those who have believed for 50 years and those who have believed 50 days or minutes.

v.16 and so it is, that many who are first now will be last then; and those who are last now will be first then.

God graciously welcomes all who seek him. God reads the heart, it’s not the number of Bible verses you can repeat, it’s what those verses have said to your heart and how they

have changed you. It's not the number of years you have given to church life, it's why.

And this is the wonder of the grace of God we all live under.

We all do, say or think things that we regret, when we say sorry we appreciate the grace of forgiveness.

When I look back at my early years of belief I do thank God for the grace that was shown to me as I struggled with God turning my life round. I was fortunate that I was nurtured by Christians of long standing who understood and had the patience to listen to me and not condemn me, because they understood that I too was loved by God.

Let's pray together:

Lord, as we bow our heads before you in prayer, send your Holy Spirit to show us where we are experiencing your grace at this time.

Lord God, make us more thankful for what we have received, more content with what we have and more mindful of other people in need.

A moment of quiet reflection as we think and give thanks to God for his gracious love and understanding.



May the Father's love enfold us, the grace of Christ uphold us, the Holy Spirit guide us; one God to walk beside us.  
Amen