

Rev Tim Perkins
March 10th 2021

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’” Matthew 20: 13 – 15

Dear Friends,

The words quoted above are taken from one of Jesus’ greatest parables about life in the Kingdom of God – the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Rev Michaela Youngson, Chair of the London District and former President of the Methodist Conference, reflects upon this parable in her notes for preachers on the commitment from the Methodist Way of Life, “We will challenge injustice.” I would like to share some of her thoughts with you:

“Like the prophets of the Old Testament (eg Isaiah 5 and the Song of the Vineyard), Jesus tells a story with a twist. He catches his audience out because they think they know who the ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ are, or who the righteous and unrighteous are. They find themselves drawn in, taking sides and then – the twist.

He tells stories to people who live in a story–telling tradition, they recognise the stereotypical characters – landowners, workers, managers; in other parables we meet widows and judges, rich and poor, party hosts and party guests. Often the story has an element of unequal power. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, the more normal telling of a story of a powerful landowner and oppressed workers is undermined. The one with power chooses to be generous and those who think they are entitled, those privileged because of health, strength, reputation, or who they know, find they are worth no more and no less than everyone else. This is a shock and results in that age old cry, ‘It’s not fair!’

This parable is followed by Jesus predicting his death and his resurrection. The first will be last and the last will be first – the Alpha and Omega will become as one of the lowest of the low, dying an ignominious death. There is a link between the unfairness of what is done to the Son of Man and the theme of our parable – one who deserves everything, yet has everything taken away. As in the parable though, there is a twist – the desolation is not the end of the story – life will come.

If we look again at the parable and imagine that God is the landowner, God desires that all will have life. (John 10:10) To pay less than the daily wage was to condemn people to hunger, even death. God who wants all to have life, however the world measures their worth, is the same God who brings Jesus back from death to a new life, which marks the beginning of the new kingdom of love and grace.

Our story is about love and grace – no one can work hard enough or long enough to earn God’s love. It is given – and we see that in Jesus Christ. The way that the world often works, those who are chosen last are the poor, the disabled, members of minorities, refugees, the broken and unwanted. In the kingdom of heaven, these are the honoured guests – those who sit at the top table.

The story makes many of us uncomfortable because our default mode is to assume we must earn our way into God's love, or be good enough to pass some test of righteousness – it's not easy to shift our thinking.

Grace is often uncomfortable – we find it hard to accept that God loves us, just as much as God loves those we hold in high esteem. It can be even more uncomfortable when we realise that God loves those we disregard or find despicable just as much as God loves us. Surely we have earned more love, more grace than those who hurt others, damage creation or don't see the world the way we do?

We might pat ourselves on the back and say, 'We have God's grace, there is nothing left to do'. And, in terms of earning salvation, we would be right.

However, we know from Scripture and from Methodist teaching that we are called to respond to God's grace – as recipients of the gift, we are transformed by love and grace – God's Spirit works within us to bring about a new life, a fuller life, a life in which it troubles us that others are treated unfairly.

When did you last cry 'It's not fair!'?

- Was it because you found out that people in your community are going hungry?
- Was it because asylum seekers and refugees are left to live without the means to support themselves and their families because of Government policies?
- Was it because you saw a person treated unfairly because of their colour, sexuality, disability or gender?
- What makes you want to challenge injustice?
- How do we as individual followers of Jesus and as part of the Methodist Family choose to challenge injustice?

Visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk to find out more about how Methodists and other Christians are responding to injustice – and how you can get involved.

Visit www.allwecan.org.uk to learn about how the Methodist relief and development charity addresses issues of injustice worldwide and find out how your church can give generously.

For reflection...

- Where do you see injustices or unfairness in our world today?
- How do you and your church community seek to challenge injustice?
- What do you need to help you with keeping this commitment?

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

Financial Giving & Gift Aid

We are grateful to everyone who has continued to make regular offerings to their church throughout the Covid Pandemic lockdowns. This has been particularly important during a time when other sources of income have largely dried up. As we approach the end of the tax year (5th April) churches will be preparing to claim Gift Aid on qualifying income. If you are planning to make an offering to your church it would be helpful if you could do so before 5th April. If you are a taxpayer and have not yet signed a Gift Aid declaration, please consider doing so; this is a vital source of income to all churches (at no extra cost to the giver) and we need to maximise its value. Please contact your church treasurer or Gift Aid secretary for a declaration form.

Circuit CAP Debt Centre Easter Basket Appeal

We are putting together Easter Baskets for the families that we are working with. Each basket will include eggs for the children and some other goodies for the whole family to enjoy. Easter is an amazing time to share our faith and to show them the love of God. If you would like to purchase something to go in, you can either send me an email or give me a call.

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District Ordinands' Testimony Service

Each year our Methodist District arranges a service of testimony for those probationer Ministers proceeding to Ordination at the Methodist Conference in the summer. This year our District will be sending two probationer Ministers forward for Ordination, Revds Tim Broughton and Becki Stennett. Their testimony service will be held on **Monday 15th March** at 7.30pm. You are warmly invited to share in this service as we bless Tim and Becki on their next steps in ministry.

The service will be available on the District Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/YWMMethodist/> or via YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEYksaLPIVw>

Resources for a Green Church Conference

Last week I wrote about the commitment from the Methodist Way of Life, "We will care for creation and all God's gifts. One of the key words in our Circuit Planning for Growth policy is "Sustainable". How seriously are we going to take these commitments?

If you think that the Climate Change Crisis really is an emergency, and that the Church has an important part to play in helping people transition to new ways of living more gently with God's world, then sign up for the JPIT Yorkshire online conference on:

Climate Change Emergency: Resources for a Green Church

Saturday June 12th, 2021, 9.30am-3.00pm

Registration via sue.cutting1209@gmail.com

Inspiring keynote speakers to stimulate your imagination, develop your understanding of the Bible and reinvigorate your worship life. Engaging workshops with pioneers who are already bringing together faith and action for a better world. Topics covered include:

- Biblical Theology for a Green Church
- Climate change as an existential crisis
- Liturgy & Prayer for a Green Church
- COP26: what are we doing to campaign?
- Craftivism for COP26
- The Church as a Prophetic Community
- Green Church and Evangelism
- The God Plot – The city allotment and Green Church