

Worship at Home for September 20 2020

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

If you'd like to comment or have a question, please call or email me directly:
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In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Today's prayers and reflection follow the theme of 'Land' as we mark the second Sunday in the Season of Creation.

Centering Prayer

Settle us into your presence God,
like a newly-fallen acorn settles into the earth.
Help us to place our thoughts and our cares
safely into the rich soil of your love today and all days. Amen

Opening Music: "God of the Sparrow/O Beautiful Gaia"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dbzc_LbNU3s

Opening Prayer

God of strong mountains and delicate flower petals,
God of surging ocean tides and gently falling rain,
you are Master Creator, you are Source of our breath.
Help us to ponder our connections to all you have crafted,
so that we may find ways to protect and sustain your gift of creation.
As we enter into a time of worship and contemplation,
fill our hearts with wonder, our minds with curiosity and openness,
and our spirits with your presence, in Jesus' name. Amen

Scripture Matthew 20:1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the

same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

Reflection

Growing up in my home, we had a policy of 'one cuts, one chooses' when sharing cake or other treats. The premise being that if you are the one who cuts, you will try to slice pieces very evenly because your sibling would get the first choice. The concept of fairness was at the root of this practice, that each should attempt to get the same as the other. Today, when we purchase goods and services, when we access the justice system, even when we share communion, there is a sense that we should strive to get exactly the same amount of whatever is being offered as everyone else.

And if we are the ones offering the goods or services or even justice, we should all receive in direct proportion to our actions. If you cut cake unevenly, your sibling may get a bigger slice. If you work or produce less you should make less money; if you are last in the line at communion you may receive a smaller portion of bread or juice. If you work to follow God's ways all your life your 'reward' should be greater than those who come to faith and understanding in their latter days.

Jesus turns these ideas upside down when he speaks of God's way in the parable above. In the righteousness of God's loving *kin-dom*, all can truly receive a share of God's gifts regardless of what they offer or what they have done, no matter where they stand in the 'line' of living in our society. God's generosity knows no limits, God's love so abundant that all may partake, God's compassion so deep that there is always enough. In the declaration that *Black Lives Matter* (because we have created a society where we collectively act as if they do not) to the work of creating health, education and justice systems that see the God-beloved worth in all people, we find echoes of Jesus' world-changing and world-challenging words "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

*Have there been times in your life when you believed that you deserved more than another?
Have there been times when you actively worked to put the last first, and the first last?*

How does this parable relate to our theme of Creation Time, other than the detail that the labourers were being hired to work in a vineyard? I believe that when we have chased our desires for having our 'fair share', when we have ignored God's truth of firsts and lasts, the 'needs' of creation, and in particular the land, have also been ignored. You need to look no further than the rapid swelling of the urban landscape that turns the field and forest into commercial or residential use to notice that 'empty' land seems to have no worth to us. In so many ways, we disregard our impact on creation when we live with a 'me first' attitude in life and in society. We treat creation as if it is one of the 'lasts.'

I am not suggesting that we are always consciously selfish or self-serving, but we do tend to live as if humanity is the most important of all God's creatures. We do tend to want our governments to make decisions that benefit the 'firsts', even while we know that the 'lasts' – including creation – are vulnerable.

As people of faith, who see God at the centre of our lives, our world, our universe, I believe we are constantly called to and reminded of God's abundance. We are called to turn our perspectives upside down to live God's kingdom life of plenty right here and right now. We are invited to action that both identifies the 'lasts' and puts them first. It is holy work, Jesus-inspired work, Godly work.

We are not alone in this calling or in this labour. We have a strong community of faith in which to study, plan, and work. We have scripture that guides us; we have freedom of word and action. We have the Spirit to move us and Christ to accompany us and God who loves us. We have the beauty, wonder and gifts of creation to sustain us –as long as we remember that sometimes it needs to be 'first'. Amen

Music: How Great Thou Art

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKGf06YM7rQ>

Prayers of the People

Holy Creator God, today we bring our thanks and praise. Today we bring our concerns for this earth, and for all the fragile and vulnerable creatures, growing things and elements in creation.

We bring our thanks for the rich and life-bearing soil in our gardens and in our flower pots.
We bring our thanks for the dust of the Sahara that eventually reaches all spaces on the planet
We bring our thanks for sand and loam, for clay and peat.

We thank you, God, for ancient sands where our faith ancestors walked,
and the thin soil of the rainforest that has yet been undisturbed by humanity.
We thank you for the soil created in backyard composters, and the soil scraped from
the Canadian Shield by receding glaciers and deposited in some of Ontario's farm lands.

We offer thanks for scientists who work with soil, increasing our knowledge and understanding:

engineers, agronomists, chemists, geologists, physical geographers, ecologists, biologists, microbiologists, silviculturists, sanitarians, archaeologists, and specialists in regional planning.

We remember, God, that much of the soil on which we walk, run, play, garden and build is precious and teeming with life and the nutrients for living. Help us to grow in our respect and care for what is beneath our feet. We remember and pray for people and places where the very ground has been injured. We pray for Beirut as it continues to heal, we pray for the western coast of the US, we pray for those experiencing drought in the Gulf of Guinea region and those affected by flooding Pakistan and the Sudan.

Compassionate God, we pray for those who may feel they are standing on uncertain ground – those who are ill or alone, those who are grieving the loss of a loved one or of security, those still struggling with the restrictions of pandemic life. We continue to pray for students returning to school and the teachers and other staff who join them.

God who grounds us and roots us in love, hear our prayers – those we have spoken and those on our hearts today. Send us into your world deeply aware of our connections to creation, to one another, and to your Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Closing music: "For the Beauty of Earth" John Rutter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFz3uQblmnw>

Blessing

May the God of the sparrow give wings to your cares,
May the Christ of the stilled waters accompany you in the storms of your life,
May the Spirit of love and gentleness guide your steps.
Amen