

Praying the Parables: Week 1: The labourers in the vineyard

About parables...

Parables draw from everyday experience.

All of life is a place where God's word is being sown.

Parables work at the level of our imagination and memory

- They awake pictures that play in our mind and lead us to a new understanding.
- Stories invite our imagination and participation: we imagine ourselves there, feel what the characters feel and search for meaning within what takes place

Parables may have a strong sense of challenge for the person who hears or reads them.

For example the man of law forced to admit that the Samaritan was the true neighbor who fulfilled God's Law [Luke 10:25-37].

Defining truth or exploring truth?

- It is rare that a parable is precisely interpreted in the Gospels. Sometimes the meaning of the parable is suggested; often meaning is left undefined for us to wrestle with.
- Rather than define truth in a statement, parables invite us to explore what is true with open mind and heart.
- Parables reflect that truth is often mysterious
- Rather than require us to obey or conform, parables invite us to respond.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴ and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶ 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?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² 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.' ¹³ 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? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Matthew 20. 1-16

Praying a Gospel parable:

See Jesus' explanation of why he teaches in parables in Matthew 13: 10-16

I ask God for what I desire – for example that I be open to the Spirit's leading and have the willingness to respond.

I remember that hearing, perceiving and understanding are all God's gift to me.

I hear the parable – I read it through pondering on its meaning for me, attending to those parts of the story that seem to meet me in the place where I am today

I look at the parable – I visualise the scene Jesus describes, asking God to guide my seeing

I seek to understand the meaning of the parable for me, asking God to guide my reflection

When I am ready I turn to God, expressing the prayer that arises from my heart

I rest quietly in the presence of God, open to receive what I need at this moment for my wholeness or the world's wholeness.

The same method can be applied to praying through the 'parable' of a dream that feels significant, a life event, or something we see that for us has the flavour of a parable.

Are you envious because I am generous?

- Carry the word 'generous' around with you today.
- Hold the words 'generous' and 'God' together
- When have you experienced generosity? From whom? How able were you to receive it?
- Be open to any invitation today to act generously or receive another's generosity

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear [Matthew 10.16]

- As each day begins ask for the grace of openness to see or hear the Word of God within what you experience in the day ahead.
- Towards the end of the day, sit down with Jesus, just as the disciples did. In his company, remember your day, and within it, anything that you saw, heard or felt that seemed to carry some hint of meaning.



- Ask Jesus to help you sift through these experiences: to see, to hear and to begin to understand.
- Most of what you remember will seem small and ordinary –and yet it is in the ‘small’ and ‘ordinary’ that the Word of God is sown.