



20th September 2026

17th Sunday after Pentecost

Stewardship Sunday

Resist Questioning God's Generosity

Greetings! It's great to be here as part of our church family, as we enter into the 17th Sunday after Pentecost. May I welcome all who are watching via 'Live screen'.

Today's readings are a great teaching on the challenge we all face in life of how to accept God's wonderful wisdom and mercy, even though they continually challenge what we perceive God should do in our life experiences!

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Don't you love the book of Jonah and how the author of this story deliberately chooses an open ending? From this story we see that Jonah knows his God quite well, but that doesn't mean he has to like him. He thinks God is ridiculously soft, and if God chooses to make a fool of himself, over Ninevah, that doesn't mean Jonah has to join in.

As Jonah shouts at God, we finally find out why Jonah ran away from God's commission in the first place! ***"I know you God!" Jonah shouts, "I'll be preaching judgement, like you told me to, then you'll go and forgive the people, and make me look like a fool."***

And that is precisely what happens! In seconds, Jonah forgets how much he relied on God's loving forgiveness to get him out of the belly of the whale, or if he doesn't forget, he doesn't see why the characteristics should not be only reserved for Jonah!

Why does God have to be loving and forgiving to everyone!

Why does Jonah so hate the idea of God's forgiveness of others? It surely can't really be about the loss of his own of face. After all he has converted a whole great sophisticated city of Ninevah, to the way of the Lord! Jonah must realize how he will be honoured and praised for it?

So, no, this isn't really about Jonah's need to look big, but about his perception of justice!

God should do what is just and punish the wicked, otherwise who will ever take Him – or his prophets – seriously again?

In today's Gospel reading from Matthew, the people working in the vineyard, too, are a bit concerned about the **'slipping standards'**. What this land owner is doing could create ill feeling and unrest throughout the market place, with no one knowing what to expect!

The people who had been working all day forgot how glad they had been to see extra workers, and how much easier it made their work with the extra help, and how the later workers had shared their food and drink, not having needed it while they were standing around in the market place, waiting to be hired.

They also still forgot they were taking home a good day's wages for their families, and that other workers had families too. Although they got exactly what they had bargained for, somehow it felt diminished because others also had it.

Like Jonah, the all-day workers forget that they needed first what God was now offering to others. In their case, they argue, it is their entitlement!

That these others had not earned it, and hence should not have it!

Jonah can't see a saved city, rejoicing in God and blessing the name of His prophet, because all he can think about is what God should have done instead.

The all-day workers can't see the good day's wages, the well picked vineyard, and the joy of other workers at being able to feed their families, because they are too wrapped up in their own sense of grievance.

Jonah could have dined out for months to come, feted by the city he saved, and all the workers could have gone to the pub together, and spent a little of what they'd earned, sharing a convivial evening, and sharing stories of the strange master they had been working for.

But instead, they choose to be isolated and embittered!

Philippians offers the alternative story, where people accept with gratitude what they were offered, and **'strive side by side'**. Paul is not threatened as the Philippians are Christians too! On the contrary, Paul is thrilled!

The Philippians are not angry about Paul's share of the limelight, but see him as an example, rather than a rival!

It is easy for us to see Jonah and the all-day workers as rather **'comic caricatures'**, responding as surely as we never would do, to God's generosity to others! Which is why we have to take seriously not just the selfishness but also their concern about justice.

- Is Jonah not right to think that God will cheapen forgiveness, and will end up encouraging wrong doing, because people can point out that God doesn't seem to mind it much?
- Are the workers not right to suspect that the vineyard owner will have increasing trouble getting people to work for him all day, if they come at the last moment and still get a full day's pay?
- Should we not allow God to be God?

Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom subverts our established order. It surprises us because the God of Jesus is a God of surprises! The master of the vineyard has not been unjust.... He has been extraordinarily generous. It is this strange and unexpected generosity which causes the problem.

Those who think they can calculate exactly how God must act are in for a surprise! Yet, God's plan is to bring delight and fulfilment to everyone!

All who work in the Lord's vineyard should be delighted that some receive what is just, while others have been blessed by God's great generosity.

Who are we to question why?

Cannot God do what He likes with His love?

As Matthew 20 verse 13 says, ***even the grumbler is called "my friend"!***

Amen.