

SERMON

Rev Zoe Heming

We all want to be treated fairly don't we? Many of us may remember events from our childhood where we felt that we were being treated unfairly in some small way that might still even niggle us to this day. Or perhaps like me you've got children who call you out when you haven't done for one exactly as you have done for another. It's not fair!

I like how Jesus uses ordinary, everyday stories and life to help people better understand something about themselves, each other and God. The story we've just heard is 2000 years old and the world has changed so much. People have changed so much too haven't they? Haven't they?

Perhaps not as much as we'd like to hope. It's quite easy to identify with those workers who'd worked all day and gotten the same day's wages as those who'd arrived much later. It sounds fairly reasonable doesn't it? A fair days' work for a fair day's pay. But that's what they were given, so what's their problem?

I think the answer is as necessary for us to hear today, again, as it was then. The way God values us, is not the same as we value each other.

Emily Richardson's question about who those people were, who were only hired at the end of the day, should cause us to pause. When asked why they weren't working by the landowner, they responded it was because nobody had hired them even though they were in the place where day labourers were hired. We are invited to speculate why. Is it because they were new to town? Or were they from a different community? Did something about them put them at the back of the queue each day?

The Gospels are filled with Jesus's encounters with people who were forced to beg because of disability, or illness, or some other community shame which excluded them and pushed them to the margins of society. He was often accused of mixing with people who were not thought to be suitable for a good Jew to spend time and energy on.

Do those same prejudices exist today? Do some people get pushed to the back of the queue? What about in church?

This story showed them, and us, that God doesn't value like the free market economy does. We cannot compete for God's love. It is freely given. And that does not value it either. On the contrary. Whilst this may seem like bad business sense to a vineyard owner, a church is not a business. A church is the body of Christ, a community of people who share strengths and weaknesses, where people are valued because each are a reflection of who God is.

And 2000 years ago people thought God would send a warrior to free people from the Roman empire, but instead he sent a carpenter, who became a refugee, and a victim of awful injustice, who came back with a wounded body to show that wholeness isn't the same as perfection.

God does not measure one person against another, in the same way that no parent ranks children by preference or ability. So is that fair? I think so.