

THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

The Twenty-fifth Sunday of the Year (Trinity 15)

'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.' [St Matthew 20:1-16]



If this landowner had a Human resources Department, I do not think that they would have been particularly happy with him. First of all he bypassed them and went to the market-place to hire workers for himself and he repeated this action two or three times in the day. Towards the end of the day he went out again and set on those who had been standing around all day, possibly because they were not the most reliable workers. He agreed a proper day's wage for the ones he hired in the morning, but paid the same wage to all of the others he had hired, even those who only did an hour's work! Perhaps he thought that they had families to feed as well and it wasn't their fault that nobody had hired them. The way he saw it was that he was not being unjust to those hired early in the morning. He was being charitable, merciful, to those he hired at the end of the day.

Of course, this is not a story about industrial relations. Properly applied the lesson of today's parable is that if we begrudge generosity to the less fortunate, then we cannot call ourselves Christian. If we do not rejoice in the benefit given to others, then we cut ourselves off from the benefits we have received.

The grumblers tried to argue it out with the landowner but received short shrift. We cannot tell God how to be God. We have to do our best to respond to the call to labour in God's vineyard as we have received it. That call means that we are open to God's mercy in our lives and that we should try to become channels of God's mercy in the lives of others. This is the Christian Faith. The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard should perhaps be known better as the Parable of the Good Employer. It challenges us to ask God to help us become channels of his grace and mercy