

## **“Grumbling against God”**

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday September 20, 2020

Matthew 20:1-16

How many of you will admit that there have been times when you have grumbled against God?

I say how many of you will admit to it, because I think we all do it sometimes, just some of us are willing to admit to it.

We get the idea that we shouldn't grumble against God, and we shouldn't, but it is a very Biblical thing to do – and we are in the company of God's people when we do it.

One of the classic examples of us, God's people grumbling against God is from Exodus. God's people are grumbling because they are hungry, and afraid they will starve in the wilderness.

This is no small problem.

The people were rescued out of Egypt, out of slavery, freed from Pharaoh, and they were in the second month of wandering in the wilderness.

Moses had told them that God was going to lead them to the promised land, and that's good news, but Moses (and God) didn't mention how long it was going to take to get there, or all the hardships that they were going to face along the way!

It is no small thing to be shaped into God's people, as we all know.

Do you remember in the Garden of Eden, there were a few moments when everything was perfect – there was communication between God and the man and the woman – there was fellowship with God and his creation.

And then doubt entered through the serpent, and the temptation came – “you could be like God”.

The temptation was to do without God – to be our own god – and sin multiplied from there.

So God, who had chosen this people, God who had rescued them from slavery, God set about to restore them to right relationship to himself.

God led the people out into the wilderness, and in those years they learned about God, about who God is, about what it means to be God's chosen people.

Lessons not learned easily.

There are all kinds of challenges in the wilderness, all kinds of problems, serious problems that the people faced.

And very often in the midst of the problems the first response of God's people is to grumble against God.

We, God's people forget how much God has done for us day by day, we forget how much God has brought us through already, we doubt God's loving care, and we grumble against God.

And yet, how does God respond?

By providing for them – generously, graciously day by day.

As the people turn to God, God responds providing what is needed, and shaping the people into his own people.

The stories of scripture shows us that God is trustworthy and patient, and even when God's people grumble and cry out against God, God responds with loving care.

We flip to the new testament – the disciples and God's people learning what the kingdom of heaven is about.

How do we live as citizens of God's kingdom?

What is life in the kingdom like?

Well, at the beginning it looks a lot like we like and expect.

It looks like everyone is working in the fields of the Lord, which is good news.

Work is good.

When we labour in the Lord's vineyard it is good work, we earn a just pay, and are paid as we agreed.

Isn't it a good thing when we have completed a good day's work?

We go to bed, giving thanks for what was accomplished.

Now understand that the labourers in the marketplace are all looking for a daily wage, so that they might feed themselves and their family for that day.

And notice also in the parable that the owner doesn't seem concerned about how many labourers he needs.

He doesn't look at the harvest and decide he still needs more help, rather he goes back into the marketplace and invites any who want, any who are still in need, and are willing, to go and work for him.

And then we find ourselves in a different kind of world and kingdom than the one we are expecting.

In the kingdom of heaven, the owner, the master over all, calls some of those who came last, and pays them first, and they receive a gift great and gracious.

This master is generous.

And as he gets to those who came first – those who worked all day – they are expecting a big reward – a great reward- but they get the same as everyone else – a good days pay.

And they grumble against the master, and even are angry with him.

Life in the kingdom isn't what we expect...

And then the parable makes us stop and think, and consider who we are in the story, and the nature of the kingdom of heaven.

And the words of master grab hold of us – “are you envious because I am generous?”

And that's the issue – we want the gracious generous gifts of God for ourselves. We are envious when God is gracious to others.

What happened to being thankful for a good days work?

What happened to being thankful for our family having food for today?

What happened to being thankful that my neighbour who was hired later was also blessed so that his family and children might eat today?

Why aren't we thankful that everyone has sufficient for today – and celebrate together the generosity of the Master together?

And finally, do we really think we're the ones who have earned God's payment?

Do we truly believe that we are some of the first in the kingdom?

Or can we see how truly generous God is to all of us, even when we grumble?

Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your provision for us every day. Teach us to trust you, teach us to respond to all the goodness you shower upon us day by day. Teach us to live and give as you do. Amen