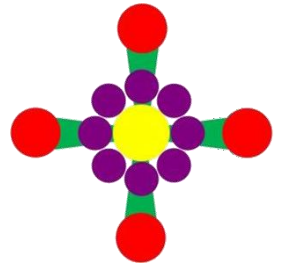


**The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 20 September 2026
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity**



Take a moment to be still. God is with you and unites his church by His Spirit.

The light and peace of Jesus Christ be with us all;
The glory of the Lord has risen upon us;
Let us rejoice and sing God's praise for ever!

**Almighty God,
Unto whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Song of Praise from Psalm 34

**Glorify the Lord with me; exalt his name, for great is he!
I'll praise the Lord for ever and ever!**

I'll praise the Lord for ever and ever, My soul shall boast of his wonderful name
I sought the Lord, he answered my calling, Delivered me from my innermost fears.

**Glorify the Lord with me; exalt his name, for great is he!
I'll praise the Lord for ever and ever!**

O taste and see how gracious the Lord is
Secure are they who take refuge in him:

The Lord redeems the faithful who serve him, And those who trust him he never condemns:

**Glorify the Lord with me; exalt his name, for great is he!
I'll praise the Lord for ever and ever.**

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers
of your people who call upon you;
and grant that they may both perceive and know
what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Today's Scripture Readings

First Reading: Jonah 3:10-end of 4

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, 'O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' And the LORD said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.' But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die.'

Then the LORD said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'

Thanks be to God for the gift of His word

Gospel reading: Matthew 20:1-16

'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.'

Thanks be to God for the gift of His Holy Word

One of the phrases I heard a lot when my children were younger was:
“It’s not fair!”

It is one of those phrases that seems to come naturally to children. It’s not fair that she got a bigger piece of cake! It’s not fair that she gets to stay up later. And when my daughter was younger, “It’s not fair” became such a familiar phrase that I bought her a book by Bel Mooney called *It’s Not Fair* just to try help her come to terms with some aspects of life.

And yet, if we are honest, we never entirely grow out of it, we might stop saying it quite so loudly, but the words are still there somewhere inside us. It’s not fair! I think that we hear echoes of that in Jesus’ parable today. The workers who have been in the vineyard all day see those who have only worked for an hour receiving the same pay as them, and they say, in effect, “It’s not fair.”

Perhaps we sympathise with them because surely it isn’t fair? If I have worked all day in the heat, surely I should get more than someone who has turned up at the last minute. If I have given years of my life, surely that should count for something or if I have tried to do the right thing, surely I should receive more than the person who hasn’t.

We have a very strong sense of fairness and that’s not necessarily a bad thing. We care about justice, we care about people being treated properly, we care when someone is exploited or cheated. But Jesus isn’t actually telling us that injustice doesn’t matter.

He’s asking us something much more uncomfortable...

What happens when God’s generosity doesn’t seem fair to us?

The landowner says: “Are you envious because I am generous?”

That’s the sting in the story. The problem isn’t that the first workers have been cheated, they have received exactly what they were promised.

The problem is that somebody else has received generosity and sometimes that is what we find hardest.

We can cope with receiving God’s grace, can cope with being forgiven, can cope with being welcomed, but... can we cope when God is equally generous to somebody we don’t think deserves it?

Somebody who arrived late, somebody who hasn't worked as hard, somebody whose life has been very different from ours or somebody who has made mistakes.

And God says: "I am generous."

That is the power of this parable because God's kingdom isn't a reward system or a league table. It isn't about accumulating points with God.

We cannot say, "I've done more, therefore I deserve more" because grace doesn't work like that.

Grace is grace precisely because it isn't earned and perhaps that is something we need to hear when we find ourselves quietly saying, "It's not fair."

Because sometimes life genuinely isn't fair. People suffer who don't deserve to suffer, people who give everything don't always receive what they deserve and good people still experience terrible things.

Christianity doesn't ask us to pretend otherwise but the gospel tells us that God's love isn't limited by our calculations of fairness.

God's grace keeps pouring out again and again to the person who has been faithful all their life and to the person who comes to faith late.

To the person who has wandered away and comes home and the one who thinks they are beyond forgiveness.

God doesn't look at them and say, "You've missed your chance."

God says: "Come into the vineyard" and perhaps the greatest challenge is not accepting God's generosity towards ourselves, but it's accepting God's generosity towards others, because the kingdom of heaven is not about getting what we deserve, thank God!

Instead, the kingdom of heaven is about receiving what we could never earn. Grace.

So perhaps today, when that little voice inside us says, "*It's not fair...*"

we might pause and remember the words of the landowner:

"Are you envious because I am generous?"

Then perhaps we can answer, "Lord, teach me to be grateful for your generosity to me, and generous enough to rejoice when you are generous to someone else."

Amen

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.
We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession with Astrid

Lord we come before you, joining in prayer and praise as part of the family of the Church throughout the world. We come in worship and thanksgiving, we come bringing our concerns and anxieties and trusting in your mercy. We thank you for so much in our lives, for our communities, families and friends, for the wonders of the natural world, the countryside around us. We pray that wherever human greed or carelessness or lack of concern is damaging your world, there may be repentance and changing of ways.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we pray for the needs of the world, when we hear so much of war, distrust, hatred and pride, let us pray for political leaders whose decisions affect lives far beyond national boundaries. Lead them to speak and act with wisdom and humanity.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for the many parts of the world that are marred by war, for all who mourn the deaths of young men, sons, husbands, fathers, killed in armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

We pray for civilian populations caught up in war in so many places, Gaza, Iran and that whole troubled area of the Middle East. We pray for the people of Sudan where the worst of the fighting and atrocities are now centred on areas covered by the dioceses of Heiban, Kadugli and El Obeid. Lord bless Archbishop Ezekiel, his bishops and clergy, that they may have the strength to be true shepherds of your people in the midst of war.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for victims of earthquakes, fire, flood, and epidemic disease, the men, women and children whose suffering goes on long after the rest of the world has forgotten the headline news stories, and we pray for the brave people who risk their lives to bring help to dangerous places and to bring reliable news to the rest of the world.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for our own country where we have so many blessings but still so many problems. Lord guide our leaders, national and local, in their responses to the many needs and obligations before them.

We thank you Lord, for the places where we live, for our families, friends and neighbours. We hold before you those around us in need at this time, any who are anxious or ill, waiting for treatment or perhaps recovering more slowly than they had hoped, those who must face changes in their lives and activities, and for any who mourn, whether recent or long felt loss. Lord bring comfort and healing to those in need and help us to be instruments of your love.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
And the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Final Prayer

Almighty God,
you have taught us through your Son
that love is the fulfilling of the law:
grant that we may love you with our whole heart
and our neighbours as ourselves;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Blessing

May we walk in the light of your kingdom.
May we be filled with your light and love.
Lord, be with us all through this day
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen