



## SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20<sup>TH</sup>, 2020 STEWARDSHIP II

### Stewardship of Wealth through Distributive Justice: Needs and Rights



**Jean François Millet (1814-1875): The Gleaners (Des glaneuses) 1857**

Millet lived through tempestuous times including the European revolutions of 1848. Known as a “realist” painter, he depicted scenes that are sometimes taken as romanticised rural scenes. The reality however is far different, for within these scenes are criticisms of the social and economic imbalances in then rural France. Here, the painting of three poor women – gleaners – perhaps harking back to the Book of Ruth, denounces a situation of marginalization and misery. The contrast between the shadows lengthening around the women and the illuminated background where the harvesters are celebrating their plenty, conveys the screaming injustice. The distant steward on horseback supervising the harvest, represents social order and privilege of distance from hard labour.

Last week we began our thinking around the idea of stewardship. Then we considered the question of stewardship, the use of resources *for life*, so that people may have room “to be people”, rather than less than people. The Exodus reading coupled with the Gospel story about the unmerciful servant, spoke of the connection between forgiveness as a public thing, a civic virtue and freedom. Last week, the readings indirectly raised questions over classic modern free-market societies, where debt has become the norm, where the priority for reducing private debt is never more urgent. Stewardship in the broadest sense of the term when examined through the Christian lens, is about the use of resources for life *for all*, not just some, for witness to the sort of freedom that Exodus speaks of, the freedom, the liberation offered through the theological, social and political power of forgiveness that restores”.

Today we continue the theme of stewardship, the use of resources, focused upon a different but related theme: the question of what we call distributive justice: in short justice, achieved through the right administration of wealth. Again, we hear of the spirit of Exodus, as Yahweh provides for his liberated people, and a Gospel story about wages and salaries, which is often read inadequately, and quite frankly, self-servingly. The story speaks of needs beyond even rights. Today, we live in rights-based societies, although, increasingly that is up for debate as legislated rights are freely and quite intentionally subverted. The thrust of this story runs in the opposite direction of contemporary societies. The point is that at times not even rights are enough. The Christian while affirming human rights, actually goes much further and speaks of the priority of needs. A needs-based world-view is much more radical than a rights-based one. Rights are often minimalist. The consideration of human need is an altogether more realistic and realist position: the position of Jesus, and of course the Exodus tradition, which he took up and lived out

## GATHERING

**We Prepare:** In resurrection tua (Taizé, Global Virtual Choir)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-hybuhxJg8>

### Invitation to Worship

In the name of God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you

**And also with you**

### Lighting the Paschal Candle

**Hymn:** And can it be (Sagina, C. Wesley)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQeIGbKqiW8>

### Opening Prayers

Generosity, the pre-eminent mark of God in the Christian lexicon, often referred to as grace, is something that we tend to spiritualize, apply to God's relationship with us in personal terms. The Hebrew and Christian traditions see grace much more broadly and concretely than this: generosity or grace, characterizes God's created order, for creation is a moment of *tangible liberation*. Indeed, the very idea of justice itself, (*sedakah* in the Hebrew and *dikaioisyne* in the Greek) – seldom well understood among Christians – is all about the distribution of resources and wealth – in such a way as to reflect this divine generosity of the created order, reinforced in the story of Exodus that we are currently reading, where Yahweh's grace frees the slaves. The Gospel reading for today, talks about grace through the lens of relationships, community relationships and labour relationships. Let's use the image of "being" in order to dig deeper to understand this idea of generosity: social, economic and political grace run wild.

O God

we pray for another way of being:  
one marked by grace run wild  
***generosity grounded in Jesus.***

We pray for imagination:

to see just what generosity might look like,  
***how far it might stretch.***

That it might shape our way of seeing our immediate relationships with family and beyond!

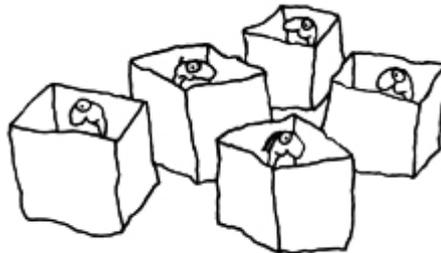
***That it might shape our way of thinking about community, society, the earth!***

That it might shape our way of thinking about governance and policy!  
That it might shape our way of reconsidering labour relationships with capital!

That we might cease from compartmentalizing grace,  
tucked safely away,  
reduced to a religious doctrine,  
abstracted from the real world in which we live.

God, lead us to a footpath,  
a walk-way of reformed, renewed insight!  
Lead us there,  
where step-by-step,  
we may feel  
***the earth's love beneath our feet,  
the movement of creation in our hearts,  
the embrace of our commonality in and through Jesus***

God, lead us to the slow-path,  
to the joyful insights of the pilgrim,  
***to another way of being***  
***Amen***



## **The Peace**

Today as we share the peace, we are asked to consider and pray for the people of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Peru. Let us keep the broad populations of these national communities, as well as particular groups in our prayers: the lower-middle class and poor communities who have been especially hard-hit by corona virus; for the indigenous communities – in Peru, Ecuador and Brazil – who have been the victim of both the virus and simultaneously, destruction of their land by vested agricultural interest; and for the land itself, currently in Brazil, subject to the ravages of fire, again organized by large corporate interests for export crops. Below is a prayer for balance and peace from the Mapuche communities of southern Chile. If you wonder what a Mapuche might look like – consider Gilda Dornan (her maiden name is Soto)– for she is a combination of Mapuche and Spanish.

God of life, Mother of all, you renew creation.  
Bring us peace and justice, ‘balance’ in the Mapuche sense:

balance and harmony for the earth,  
 balance and harmony for the peoples of the world,  
 balance and harmony for men and women,  
 balance and harmony between nature and ourselves and God.

(\*Mapuche means ‘people of the earth’. They are the aborigines living in the south of Chile and Argentina. Source: the Mapuche Pastoral Team, Santiago, Chile. From: The website Red de Liturgia, Latin American Council of Churches)

## HEARING THE WORD

### A Way into the Readings

#### Including Some Insights from Catholic Social Teaching about Distributive Justice

“Workers are not to be treated as slaves; justice demands that the dignity of human personality be respected...It is shameful and inhuman...to use men and women as things for gain and to put no more value on them than what they are worth in muscle and energy.”

**Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* – *New Things*, S31, 1891**

According to certain nineteenth century liberal market theories, “Work was understood and treated as a sort of ‘merchandise’ that the worker...sells to the employer, who at the same time is the possessor of the capital, that is to say, of all the working tools and means that make production possible. **Pope John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* – *On Human Work*, S5**

Casualisation of labour allows employers to achieve substantial cost reductions in the short run, and no doubt contributed to the big burst of productivity growth in the mid-1990s. But its long-term effects are highly damaging.

The other big development is the rise of contract-based work. This is really two developments. The first is the replacement of awards and enterprise agreements by individual contracts for employees. Here employees lose the protections that are commonly inserted in awards or enterprise bargains.

More radical is the shift from employment to self-employment as an individual contractor. This kind of conversion is even worse than a

shift to employment contracts and is commonly a euphemism for unemployment.

**Professor John Quiggin, University of Queensland, “Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk Among Us.”**

### **Exodus 16:2-15 – Learning to live according to need**

The people of Israel have journeyed on from the Reed Sea and are now on the way to Mount Sinai. Yet the people are now hungry, and they are complaining to both Moses and Aaron (16:2). The Sinai Peninsula is a barren place, so it is neither unexpected nor unrealistic that such a large group of people are finding it difficult to get adequate food and water. They do what most people do when they face change, or difficult circumstances – they idealise the past and complain bitterly to those responsible for the present. They forget that life in Egypt was slavery and oppression. At least then they recall, they had food and water. Their rescuers Moses and Aaron are made to share the blame for the present circumstances. In response God promises them bread, and actually showers them with it on a daily basis, to which they respond: “what is it?” Even when met with God’s generosity, they continue in their anxiety.

<sup>2</sup> In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

<sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning, you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” <sup>8</sup> Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

<sup>10</sup> While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

<sup>11</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning, you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

<sup>13</sup> That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup> When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. <sup>15</sup> When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

The word of the Lord

***Thanks be to God***

### **Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45 – a recalling of Exodus**

We have read Psalm 105: a few weeks ago (July 26<sup>th</sup>, Pentecost 8A and again but different verses, August 30<sup>th</sup>, Pentecost 13A). Psalm 105 is one of a handful of psalms which recount part of the history of Israel (see also Pss 78, 106, 135, 136). It is also one of the psalms that ends with the word hallelujah, ‘praise the Lord’ (cf. Ps 106 etc.). After a general introduction calling people to give thanks to the Lord (vv. 1-4) they are then called on to ‘remember’ (v. 5). This is one of the major themes of the psalm. Memory and remembrance are the key to this recounting of Israel’s early history. But it is memory with a purpose, and the memory that the psalmist recounts is tailored to that purpose. This week, the latter verses are predictably focused upon the Exodus and themes of freedom and justice

<sup>1</sup> Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name;  
make known among the nations what he has done.

<sup>2</sup> ***Sing to him, sing praise to him;  
tell of all his wonderful acts.***

<sup>3</sup> Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

**4 Look to the LORD and his strength;  
seek his face always.**

**5 Remember the wonders he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,**

**6 *you his servants, the descendants of Abraham,  
his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.***

**37 He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold,  
and from among their tribes no one faltered.**

**38 *Egypt was glad when they left,  
because dread of Israel had fallen on them.***

**39 He spread out a cloud as a covering,  
and a fire to give light at night.**

**40 *They asked, and he brought them quail;  
he fed them well with the bread of heaven.***

**41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out;  
it flowed like a river in the desert.**

**42 *For he remembered his holy promise  
given to his servant Abraham.***

**43 He brought out his people with rejoicing,  
his chosen ones with shouts of joy;**

**44 *he gave them the lands of the nations,  
and they fell heir to what others had toiled for—***

**45 that they might keep his precepts  
and observe his laws.**

***Praise the LORD.***

### **Philippians 1:20-30 - Inclusive unity**

This early section of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi seeks to encourage the Christian community there. Paul writes from prison, and is not engaging in pious speculation when he considers his options. From v.27, after the niceties, Paul begins to deal with the issue that concerns him: Christian unity. For Paul, unity has its basis in Christ, who shows us God's goodness and generosity. This unity is radically inclusive in its scope and does not discriminate against others. Paul's attack is upon religious fundamentalists in the community, who wish to impose the doctrine of circumcision upon all Christians, regardless of cultural history: Jew and Gentile alike. Generosity has priority over dogmatism.

**20** I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. **21** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **22** If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful

labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

<sup>27</sup> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit,<sup>[a]</sup> striving together as one for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

### **Matthew 20:1-16 – A story from Jesus about stewardship which redistributes wealth according to need.**

In this story the casual labourers are called together at the end of the day and paid, beginning with the last hired. They receive a day's wage: a denarius, considered enough to live on for a day. But all the others receive the same amount, including those who had worked since early morning. There is no way that this is equitable, so there is outrage. Jesus has a way of using outrageous people and situations in his stories. It is subversive story telling which turns normal values upside down. The employer kept the contract he had made with the first hired, but also gave the last hired what they needed to live. The last hired received their denarius, their living. Viewed from this perspective the practice comes close to what for Australians *used to be* a norm of sorts: an adequate provision, making sure people had enough to live on. The point here is that Jesus applies a different standard: human need, not earning rights. To view it in this way puts things in a new perspective. It does not smooth out all the rough edges, but it is enough to open the door to a different way of thinking. There is a different set of values operating. People are being treated according to *their needs*, not according to *what they deserve according to market logic*.

The issue raises the matter of rights. These days it is common to ally the gospel with the demand for human rights. In many situations the two correlate well: human rights language is important and is grounded in part in Christian thought. That said, there is a sense in which rights language undersells the Gospel. The Christian response to people,

is not simply to make sure they receive their rights, but because they are human beings, it will often mean going beyond accepted norms, beyond even their rights. Christian theology and philosophy asserts unapologetically the worth of people: their human dignity, their need for shelter, sustenance, self-determination and the like. Needs and rights are closely related, but the language of need may at times be more rigorous, be of a higher standard.

**20** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

<sup>3</sup> “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. <sup>4</sup> He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ <sup>5</sup> So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

<sup>7</sup> “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

<sup>8</sup> “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

<sup>9</sup> “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup> ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

<sup>13</sup> “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

<sup>16</sup> “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

The Gospel of the Lord  
***Praise to you Lord Christ***

**For Meditation:** Jesus bleibet meine Freude – Jesus Joy of Man’s  
 Desiring (Voces8, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, J.S. Bach)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Df7f\\_BLU8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Df7f_BLU8)

**Some Thoughts**

**Let’s Give: Our Offerings**

**Doxology**

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
 praise him, all creatures here below,  
 praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
 praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

**Prayer of Dedication**

**Prayers of the People**

After each series of petitions, the one who offers the prayers ends with the words: ***Lord instil us with your generosity, responding to human need***” and our response is ***so we may become your people.***

**Hymn: Prayer of St Francis of Assisi (Students of the Catholic University, Santiago de Chile)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nsl28lNo8z0>

Make me a channel of your peace  
 where there is hatred let me bring your love  
 where there is injury, your pardon Lord  
 and where there's doubt, true faith in you

Make me a channel of your peace  
 where there's despair in life let me bring hope  
 where there is darkness, only light  
 and where there's sadness ever joy

Oh, master grant that I may never seek  
 so much to be consoled as to console

to be understood as to understand  
to be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of your peace  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
in giving to all men that we receive  
and in dying that we're born to turn eternal life

Oh, master grant that I may never seek  
so much to be consoled as to console  
to be understood as to understand  
to be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of your peace  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
in giving to all men let we receive  
and in dying that we're born to turn around

### **Blessing and Leaving**

The blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit  
Be upon you and remain with you always

Our service has ended.  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
***In the name of Christ***

**We listen:** Ubi caritas (Audrey Assad)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z\\_Pp0jKn1zQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_Pp0jKn1zQ)

