

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

We know from experience that people can surprise us. They do not always behave as we might expect them to. Some people might surprise us in a negative sense. They do not measure up to our legitimate expectations of them; they disappoint us. Others can surprise us in a positive sense. They far exceed our expectations: they show us that there is more to them than we ever realised.

Today's parable about the vineyard and the labourers of the eleventh hour suggests to us that God will surprise us in that positive sense. God's goodness is always greater than we realise; God's generosity far exceeds our expectations – indeed, can never be contained nor limited by human expectations. God does not give to us in accordance with what we have earned. God does not calculate how much we have done and then treat us accordingly. God does not put our efforts on one side of the scale and then put an equal amount of god's favour on the other side of the scale to balance our efforts. God's mind and heart work on a far greater and more generous scale than is normal among human beings.

Sometimes we can imagine God in all too human terms. In our way of relating to others we tend to give in proportion to what we receive, to love those who love us, to bestow our favour on those who have been good to us. However, today's parable declares that God is not a more powerful version of ourselves. God is fundamentally different; God graces us in unexpected and undeserved ways. When we reflect on it, most of the best things in life are unearned; they are simply given. Nature in all its beauty and grandeur is given to us; we have not put it together; it is there to be received and, of course, respected. The human experience of being looked upon in love by another is not something we earn. We are graced by the unexpected gift of someone's friendship and love. In a similar way, God's favour, God's love is given, not earned. We are loved by God, before we do anything, because God is Love, and God does not take back that love, regardless of what we do or fail to do. The gospels, and especially today's parable, even suggest that God has a slight prejudice in favour of life's latecomers, those who take a while to get going.

There is an extravagance about God's generosity that could make us angry if we were prone to envy but is ultimately very consoling and reassuring. Indeed, true followers of Jesus are so appreciative of God's goodness in their own lives that they are never envious of God's goodness towards others. We are each challenged to reflect something of God's indiscriminate goodness and generosity in our dealings with one another. The God of surprising generosity can become palpable for others in and through our own way for relating. God's ways are indeed not our ways, but our ways can become a little more like God's ways.

Father Patrick