This short act of worship has been produced for you by Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John.

If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

**Opening Prayer**

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

**Help us to remember that you are here with us.**

**May we pray to you in faith,**

**sing your praise with gratitude**

**and listen to your word with eagerness.**

**through Christ our Lord. Amen**

The Methodist Worship Book p. 27

**Hymn: STF 20 Be Still** Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here<https://youtu.be/Y5S_-zhHfDA>

Be still, for the [presence](https://www.definitions.net/definition/presence) of the Lord, the holy One, is here;

Come bow [before](https://www.definitions.net/definition/before) him now with [reverence](https://www.definitions.net/definition/reverence) and fear:

In him no sin is [found](https://www.definitions.net/definition/found) - we [stand](https://www.definitions.net/definition/stand) on holy ground.

Be still, for the [presence](https://www.definitions.net/definition/presence) of the Lord, the holy One, is here.

Be still, for the [glory](https://www.definitions.net/definition/glory) of the Lord is [shining](https://www.definitions.net/definition/shining) all around;

He [burns](https://www.definitions.net/definition/burns) with holy fire, with [splendour](https://www.definitions.net/definition/splendor) he is crowned:

How [awesome](https://www.definitions.net/definition/awesome) is the [sight](https://www.definitions.net/definition/sight) - our [radiant](https://www.definitions.net/definition/radiant) king of light!

Be still, for the [glory](https://www.definitions.net/definition/glory) of the Lord is [shining](https://www.definitions.net/definition/shining) all around.

Be still, for the [power](https://www.definitions.net/definition/power) of the Lord is [moving](https://www.definitions.net/definition/moving) in this place;

He [comes](https://www.definitions.net/definition/comes) to [cleanse](https://www.definitions.net/definition/cleanse) and heal, to [minister](https://www.definitions.net/definition/minister) his [grace](https://www.definitions.net/definition/grace):

No work too hard for Him - in [faith](https://www.definitions.net/definition/faith) receive from him.

Be still, for the [power](https://www.definitions.net/definition/power) of the Lord is [moving](https://www.definitions.net/definition/moving) in this place.

 David J Evans (b.1957)

**Prayers of Adoration**

Holy God,

To you alone belong glory, honour, and praise.

We join with the hosts of heaven as we worship.

You alone are worth of adoration from every mouth,

And every tongue shall sing your praise.

You create the earth by your power.

You save the human race in your mercy,

And renew it through your grace.

To you, loving God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Be all glory, honour, and praise

Now and for ever. **Amen**

**Prayers of Confession**

If we say we have no sin,

We deceive ourselves

And the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins,

God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins

and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let us confess our sins...

God of truth and love,

**Be merciful to us,**

**As we claim your promised forgiveness**

**Through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

God, who is faithful and just,

Assures us of pardon and peace.

**Amen. Thanks be to God**

The Methodist Worship Book P. 28, 30-31

**A reading from the Old Testament: Exodus 16:2-15**

# Exodus 16:2-15 (New International Version)

2In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3The 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.”

4Then 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. 5On 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.”

6So 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, 7and 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?” 8Moses 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.”

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

10While 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.

11The Lord said to Moses, 12“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.’”

13That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp.

**14**When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. **15**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.

**A reading from the New Testament: Matthew 20:1-16**

# Matthew 20:1-16 (New International Version)

### The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. **2**He agreed to pay them a denarius[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2020%3A1-16&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23795a)] for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

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

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. **6**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?’

**7**“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

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

**8**“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.’

**9**“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. **10**So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. **11**When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. **12**‘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.’

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

**16**“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**Reflection**

I am thankful for my African roots as this gave me first-hand experience of what it means to live hand to mouth and how terrible it is not to have money. Such an experience has helped shape my life in a lot of ways and enabled me to live with gratitude and to be gracious to others.

And this of course is not only limited to Africa or the third world countries. I have also had the opportunity to meet with some very desperate and needy people within a month of my arrival here in the Enfield circuit last month. And I have seen how people have been appreciative of the services they receive and how their lives are being transformed through the generosity of food hubs and other charitable deeds from the church and other organisations.

Our Bible readings today, take us on a journey of discovery of God’s extravagant grace and provision in the midst of scarcity and insecurity.

First the reading in Exodus recount the story of the Israelites after they had crossed the red sea and the uncomfortable position they found themselves in, wishing they had stayed in Egypt and longing to go back to the life that they had left behind there and of course not trusting in God. However, God continued to be gracious to them and they were given manna from heaven, far more than they would have had as slaves in Egypt. The provision of manna and the act of sharing bread was transformative - it enabled the Israelites to come together as a community, helping one another as they continue their journey through the wilderness.

In the gospel reading from Matthew, we have a bunch of workers who became dissatisfied with their employer because of the employer’s so-called ‘generosity’.

It is interesting to note that throughout the gospels, Jesus uses so many parables with money-related themes: Jesus had just had an encounter with the rich young man in Matthew 19, who wanted to know what he must do to have eternal life and then went away despondent when Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. The disciples had started to think about their own position given that they had left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus had promised that “**29**And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wifeor children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19: 29) Furthermore in verse 30 of Matthew 19 he says that ‘many who are first shall be the last and many who are last shall be first’.

And so, it is in this reality that we hear the words of Jesus in the gospel reading appointed for today. This chapter in Matthew (chapter 20: 1-16) explains what it might mean for “the last to be the first” and tells the parable of a landowner who was labelled as ‘unfair’ because he was too ‘generous’.

In this parable, the landowner went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard and agreed to pay them a daily rate of one denarius. He went out again at various times throughout the day - at 09:00 hrs, 12 noon, 3 pm and 5pm, hired the men and promised to pay each one a fair wage. At the end of the day when it was time to pay the workers, the landowner decided to pay the workers starting with those who were hired last. It turned out that he paid those who started work at 5 pm the same money as those whom he hired at the crack of dawn. When the workers who had been hired first realised this, they began to grumble. They were angry because they had done a lot more work than those who started at 5pm. However, the landowner was very oblivious of their complaints and did not listen to them. Rather he reminded them that they had agreed to receive the daily rate of the one denarius when they were hired. He said to them “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ **16**“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

So, is it fair that those who work the longest should get the same money as those who only managed to work for an hour? Or to put it in our context, is it fair that those who work an 8 or 12 hour shift should be paid the same as those who work for only an hour?

Of course, that is unheard of! There will be righteous anger and a lot of complaints if that is seen to be a practice in any recruitment organisation or HR department as this would be an injustice.

However, if we look at the passage with a more critical eye, that sense of injustice might shift. In verses 3-7, Matthew highlights the number of times the landowner went back and forth to the marketplace. The landowner made five trips to the marketplace throughout the day. We are not told what the landowner’s criteria was in choosing the labourers. All we know is that this is a generous landowner who paid all his workers the same wage regardless of start and finish time. We also note how tough it was to be a day labourer - these are people who had no guarantee or security in a job neither did they have recourse to public funds or unemployment, or social services benefits and so they must stand in the marketplace hoping that an employer would pick them and give them a job for that day. And the problem is that there are usually more workers than there are available jobs. It was purely a hit or miss situation. It is crucially important to understand that those who worked only for one hour did want to work all day. After all, they had been at the marketplace at the same time as the others, ready to work but for whatever reason, were overlooked and not chosen until right near the end.

The point is not that the landowner is unfair with those who have had to work all day but rather the opposite in the sense that he was is in fact showing fairness towards the ones who were left in the marketplace without work.

And so, from what we know about parables, you have heard a lot about them in recent weeks through this online channel and the extra Podcasts that Dan has been organising. We know that in parables, Jesus often uses the familiar to convey a strong message.

Let us think for a moment about the parable of the workers in the Vineyard.

Could the workers who have been moaning and complaining, could they have been a little bit more appreciative that they even found work on the day? Could they have been thankful that their fellow labourers were given a small chance to work having waited all day and can return home and be able to feed their families? Was it necessary to begrudge them?

When we look at our lives, do we count our blessings and inhabit a culture of gratitude? Or do we chase after our misfortunes.

What the landowner gave to those workers who only worked for an hour was a way to tap into the power and graciousness of God; A means that bound up their brokenness and held them in the security of God’s love-the kind of love that transforms and renews and gives a real sense of dignity. Some of us are here because we are like those workers in the vineyard. Some of us are like the workers who got hired first, we have been in church for a very long time even all our life and we believe we should have preferential treatment. Some of us are like those workers who were hired last, we have been in the marketplace, we are living with profound need and continual loss in a fragmented society and we’ve only had a small chance to experience the wideness of God’s mercy and the good news of the Kingdom recently.

For some people, I believe that listening to, or reading about the parable of the workers in the vineyard is like encountering their own story, their own experience of the first shall be the last and vice versa.

And that is why God is calling us to experience his grace and to inaugurate a new life for us. It is the nature of God to be gracious. The parable of the workers in the vineyard is about the nature of God’s grace in the kingdom of heaven. In God’s economy of grace, no one is excluded, no one is left out. John Wesley taught a lot about “prevenient grace” that is God’s grace that comes even before we know or love God. God’s generosity is beyond human comprehension. We who have been in church longer, who have known Christ more intimately should not hold ourselves above those newcomers who are just joining the family of God. God loves everyone and invites all of us to be in right relationship with God and our fellow human beings.

We live in extremely troubled times and we are called to stand with the vulnerable in the chaos and in the mess. We are called to extend grace to others. And like the landowner, we are called to go and seek out the jobless, the fearful, the lonely and those on the margins of society, to give them new courage and integrity and to lead them into the light. Amen.

**Prayers of Intercessions.**

God our Father,

grant us the help of your Spirit

in our prayers for the salvation of all people.

We pray for the Church throughout the world,

for the Methodist church and all its members,

for us here in the Enfield circuit,

that in faith and unity we may be constantly renewed by your Holy Spirit for mission and service.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for the peoples of the world;

for the leaders of the nations

that they may seek justice, freedom, and peace for all.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for our country;

for those who have authority and influence,

for our Prime minister Boris Johnson and members of his cabinet that all may serve one another in wisdom, honesty, and compassion

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for those among whom we live and work;

for all our neighbours

for all our outreach projects across the circuit

We lift up the food hub at Edmonton,

The Space project on the Elsinge estate

We pray for continued discernment for the work of mission in other areas of the circuit.

We pray that we may so use your gifts

that together we may find joy in your creation

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for all in sorrow, need, anxiety or sickness;

We pray for healing for Revd Kathleen and all others in the circuit who are unwell. For those known to us. For those that we do not know.

That in their weakness, they may know your strength

and in despair find hope.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

In you Father, we are one family on earth and in heaven.

We remember in your presence those who have died, giving thanks especially for those who have revealed to us your grace in Christ.

Help us to follow the example of your saints in light and bring us with them to the fullness of your eternal joy.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,**

**your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as 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.**

 The Methodist Worship Book p. 35-37

**Hymn: STF 465 Guide me, O Thou Great Redeemer**

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/Ofp6rdAgRrY>

Guide me, O Thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
hold me with Thy pow’rful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliv’rer, strong Deliv’rer,
be Thou still my Strength and Shield;
be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell’s destruction,
land me safe on Canaan’s side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee;
I will ever give to Thee.

 William Williams (1717-1791)

**Blessing**

The Lord bless you and keep you;the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen

(Numbers 6: 24-26 NRSV)