

DSW Written Service Sunday 20th September 2026

Opening prayer

All creation proclaims your greatness.
Mountain top and ocean depths declare your power. You are my God and King.

Every day I will bless you.

The sun and stars proclaim your glory.
Dazzling light and shining sound declare the beauty of creation. You are my God and King.

Every day I will bless you.

The abundance of the earth displays your generosity.
The patterned universe makes known the greatness of your heart.
The outstretched arms of Christ reveal your overwhelming love. You are my God and King.

Every day I will bless you. Amen.

Hymn [STF 449]

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!
Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
And yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

Lord of all power, I give you my will,
In joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;
And, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,
Rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;
What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard
Is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.

Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
Your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,
Your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

Lord of all being, I give you my all;
If e'er I disown you, I stumble and fall;
But, led in your service your word to obey,
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

Jack Copley Winslow (1882-1974)

Reading: Matthew 20: 1-16

As Jesus was telling what the kingdom of heaven would be like, he said:

Early one morning a man went out to hire some workers for his vineyard. After he had agreed to pay

them the usual amount for a day's work, he sent them off to his vineyard.

About nine that morning, the man saw some other people standing in the market with nothing to do. He said he would pay them what was fair, if they would work in his vineyard. So they went.

At noon and again about three in the afternoon he returned to the market. And each time he made the same agreement with others who were loafing around with nothing to do.

Finally, about five in the afternoon the man went back and found some others standing there. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

"Because no one has hired us," they answered. Then he told them to go work in his vineyard.

That evening the owner of the vineyard told the man in charge of the workers to call them in and give them their money. He also told the man to begin with the ones who were hired last. When the workers arrived, the ones who had been hired at five in the afternoon were given a full day's pay.

The workers who had been hired first thought they would be given more than the others. But when they were given the same, they began complaining to the owner of the vineyard. They said, "The ones who were hired last worked for only one hour. But you paid them the same that you did us. And we worked in the hot sun all day long!"

The owner answered one of them, "Friend, I didn't cheat you. I paid you exactly what we agreed on. Take your money now and go! What business is it of yours if I want to pay them the same that I paid you? Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Why should you be jealous, if I want to be generous?" Jesus then said, "So it is. Everyone who is now first will be last, and everyone who is last will be first."

Reflection

Following Jesus' challenging teaching about forgiveness, in today's gospel reading he tells another parable about who God is and how things work in God's kingdom, which is also quite challenging.

The story begins with a group of people standing in the marketplace looking for work, which was the norm in Jesus' time, and in the UK in years gone by.

Most market towns had a hiring fair usually on market days where people from the surrounding area would gather in the Market Square waiting to be hired to work as labourers, housekeepers, maids or farm

workers by local landowners and gentry. Thomas Hardy described this kind of event in “Tess of the D’Urbervilles” and “The Mayor of Casterbridge”. Even in the early part of last century, in industrial towns, mining communities and shipyards, people would queue up outside the recruiting office hoping to find work.

We can imagine the scene, of people desperate for work, because if they don’t get taken on they can’t feed their families. In Jesus’ story some people are still standing around when the vineyard owner goes back a second, third and fourth time. We’re not told why, just they haven’t been hired. Perhaps they weren’t the fittest or strongest or youngest, or maybe they had some kind of impairment – we don’t know, but whatever the reason, they weren’t hired until very late in the day.

Some of us may have experienced being out of work or redundant, and if you’ve ever been in that position you’ll know what effect it can have on your sense of purpose and self-esteem. Being able to earn a living and use your skills to provide for yourself and the people you’re responsible for is something fundamental to us as human beings. We know that to be able to function in our society you need access to money, and if you’re not able to earn money by working, that can be very demoralising.

Even today many people, including some of us or people we know, have been or are going through the process of searching for work, making endless job applications, hoping for interviews and to be shortlisted, so we have a sense of what that feels like.

If you imagine yourself in this story, I wonder where you’d put yourself? Would you be one of the workers taken on early in the day who’d worked hard in the hot sun before getting paid? Or would you be one of the workers taken on late in the day, only working for a short time but still getting a full day’s pay?

This story, like many of the parables Jesus told, challenges and disrupts our sense of what is right & fair doesn’t it? I wonder how we’d feel if we’d worked hard all day and ended up getting the same amount of pay as someone who’s only worked for an hour or two? But God’s view is different from ours, because while we might have our ideas of who deserves what, God is generous to everyone.

This story also calls into question the idea that we can somehow “earn” God’s favour. Some people listening to Jesus tell this story probably thought they deserved a place in heaven, because they were Jewish leaders. But there were also non-Jewish people listening, who didn’t know anything about Jewish laws, but to whom Jesus was effectively offering a welcome into God’s kingdom too.

That kind of hierarchical thinking still exists, even in some areas of the church. Sometimes the people who shout the loudest, or are good speakers or evangelists get all the attention and glory. But what about the people who don’t have those gifts, who quietly and simply try to follow Jesus in their everyday lives? And the people who may not even be able to get to church, but still pray faithfully every day for other people and their needs? I like to think of them as “prayer warriors” doing battle with evil through their prayers and “standing in the gap” for those who may not be able to pray for themselves. How are they valued in our society or churches, or by God?

In this story Jesus offers us a radical view of God’s extravagant, generous grace, emphasising that God’s love is for everyone, even those we might think are unworthy of it. And he affirms that we can’t work for, or earn, God’s love and forgiveness, because he’s already given it to us as a free gift.

This story comes quite late in Matthew’s Gospel, shortly before Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem and ultimately to death on the cross, where, even as he was crucified, Jesus told the criminal hanging next to him that God’s love and forgiveness included him too.

American pastor & author Floyd McLung writes of an incident that happened while he was working in Amsterdam with a mission which ran a drop-in centre for sex workers in an area where they knew there was a Satanist temple in a nearby street.

One of his colleagues, John Goodfellow, was sitting in a bar in Amsterdam when he felt very strongly that God was telling him to go and tell the man sitting at the other end of the bar that there was nothing he could do to stop God from loving him. He felt quite awkward about talking to a complete stranger, so he hesitated, but felt the voice even stronger inside him, so he prayed silently: “Lord you know I want to do your will, but I really need to know it’s you telling me

to do this, so if you really want me to talk to that man, make the music in this bar stop.”

Just then the jukebox broke down.

So he took a deep breath & went over to the man & said “You don’t know me & this will probably sound crazy but I think God wants me to tell you that there’s nothing you can do to stop him from loving you.” The man stared at him for a moment and said “Do you know who I am?” John said “No, we’ve never met”. And the man said “I’m a high priest at the Satanist church down the road.” You can imagine how shocked John was when he heard that!

But as result of that incident, Floyd & John and the people at the mission prayed for this man & his co-workers, and several of that occult group became Christian believers.

God’s love is for everyone, in His eyes we are all worthy of his love, however late in life we turn to him. Like the master in the gospel story, God wants everyone to be included in his amazing grace and forgiveness.

Some years ago the church I was working with hosted an event at which the author & priest Father Gerry Hughes was speaking, and he told a story about another Christian event he’d spoken at. He asked the audience to imagine Jesus appearing to them and saying “Don’t worry, you’re going to be OK and you will have eternal life when you die.” And he asked them how they would feel? Several people said they’d feel happy, but would worry about what would happen to their family.

So Gerry said “Well, imagine Jesus looks you in the eye and says “Don’t worry, your family will have eternal life in heaven too” - what would you say then? Someone in the audience said “I’d say - What about my friends - can they come too?”

Gerry said, “OK, imagine Jesus says to you “Don’t worry, you, all your friends and your family, are all going to be in the kingdom of heaven when you die - in fact everyone can be in the kingdom of heaven, and only one person will be excluded” - how would you feel then?”

Several people said they’d feel bad because they wouldn’t want that one person to miss out.

And then one person said “Can I be that one person then, so that everyone else gets in?”

And Gerry Hughes said: “That is as close as we can get to the heart of God.”

That’s the kind of love Jesus is talking about. There’s nothing any of us can do to stop God from loving us. God wants the best for every single one of us. He listens to us, he hears us, he loves us and his heart longs for wholeness for us. And he longs to welcome every single person into his kingdom of love and grace, regardless of when we turn to him, because his love for each one of us goes beyond our imagination. Amen.

Hymn [STF 462]

Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world, where strangers might smile or where stones may be hurled ;
come leave what you cling to, lay down what you clutch and find, with hands empty, that hearts can hold much.

Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools !

Sing hey for the pharisees leaving their rules !

Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets !

Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets !

Come walk in my company, come sleep by my side,
come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide ;
come sit at my table and eat with my friends,
discovering that love which the world never ends.

Come share in my laughter, come close to my fears,
come find yourself washed with the kiss of my tears ;
come stand close at hand while I suffer and die
and find in three days how I never will lie.

Come leave your possessions, come share out your treasure,
come give and receive without method or measure ;
come loose every bond that’s resisting the Spirit,
enabling the earth to be yours to inherit.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

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Prayers

Loving Father God, thank you for loving us the way you do. Thank you that you know all about each one of us: you know who we are, what we’re like, you know the things we do and say, and still you love us.

Thank you for teaching us through Jesus your ways of inclusive, generous compassion;
We know how good it feels to be generous or compassionate to someone, and how good it feels when someone is generous or compassionate towards us!

Yet sometimes it feels hard to see someone else being treated generously, sometimes those words 'It's not fair!' spring too readily to our minds if not our lips.

Forgive us for grudging others the treatment we want for ourselves, and give us grace to trust in your love, and allow your generous Spirit to work in and through us day by day.

Please fill us anew with your Holy Spirit, give us your heart of love for others and help us to serve you with open hearts and a desire to share what we have with others, in the name of Jesus, who paid the ultimate price for us.

Loving God, your world is distorted by greed and envy and conflict, save us from ourselves;

we pray for people who struggle to find enough food, access to clean water and medication, or a safe place to live, in our country and in other parts of the world.

We ask you to heal wounded communities, to transform the destructive power of selfishness into the desire to work for peace and justice and for a fair sharing of the world's resources for the good of all people, wherever they may be;

Generous God: **make us generous, too.**

Loving God, like the landowner who met the needs of the workers in the vineyard, even those who'd begun work late in the day, you offer us unconditional love; we pray for those who don't know that that offer is for them too,

Give us the courage and the words to share the wonderful news of your saving love with others.

Generous God: **make us generous, too.**

Loving God we bring to you the people and situations which are on our hearts this morning, and ask that you will pour your healing love into their hearts, minds and bodies.....

God of love, God for all, your purposes are more beautiful than we can possibly imagine.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit.

Help us let go of all that holds us back.

Open our lives and our churches to new seasons of humility and faith, of change and growth.

Shake us up with the Good News of Jesus and show us the way. Amen.

The "Breakthrough Prayer"

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn [STF 350]

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
Should set his love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
When Bethlem's manger was his only home,
And that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
As with his peace he graced this place of tears,
Or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
The crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
How he will claim his earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
And he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
And some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour,
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
When at his bidding every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation
When all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heav'n, and heav'n to earth, will answer:
'At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!'

William Young Fullerton (1857-1932)

Blessing

**May we go into the world filled with grace,
as bearers of your generous love, compassion and
peace,
and may the blessing of God,
Father, Son & Holy Spirit
go with us today and always. Amen.**

*Revd Jane Wilson
September 2026*

