

## TRANSCRIPT OF BENEFICE SERVICE 20<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020

### **Welcome and Gathering Prayers – Rev Nick Bird**

Hello and welcome to our service for 20<sup>th</sup> September.

We are the churches of the Benefice of Rural East York: Stockton on the Forest, Warthill, Holtby and Dunnington, and we are very pleased that you could join us.

My name is Nick Bird, and I'm the parish priest for this group of parishes. And later in the service you will be meeting a number of my colleagues and parishioners.

We are hugely blessed with creative, faithful members who contribute to our worship each week.

### **Let us pray**

In the presence of God, and the virtual presence of one another, as we gather, let us pray.

O God,  
the creator of all and lover of souls,  
we open our hearts to you in prayer and praise.  
As we gather to worship,  
open our eyes to your presence,  
our minds to your teaching,  
our wills to your guidance,  
and our lives to the service of you and our neighbours,  
that we may come to comprehend

### **Hymn**

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
to his feet thy tribute bring;  
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
evermore his praises sing:<sup>1</sup>  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favor  
to our fathers in distress;  
praise him still the same for ever,  
slow to chide and swift to bless:  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us;  
well our feeble frame he knows;  
in his hand he gently bears us,  
rescues us from all our foes.  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Widely yet his mercy flows.<sup>2</sup>

Angels, help us to adore him;  
ye behold him face to face;  
sun and moon, bow down before him,

dwellers all in time and space.  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Praise with us the God of grace.

## Gospel Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

### The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

**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<sup>[a]</sup> 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 Homily – Mark Poole

“It’s not fair!” Or “It’s not fair!” if I follow my Lancastrian roots! This is just what you can hear those workers saying who were hired first in the parable we have just heard. “It’s not fair!” And it **does** seem understandable. It seems crazy that the owner should hire at dawn and then carry on returning to the marketplace searching out and hiring for another four times throughout the day, the last being at five O clock. Why didn’t he just hire in one job lot, wouldn’t that have made more business sense? And then, just one hour later all the workers are gathered and those who have toiled all day enduring the heat and fatigue are paid the same as those who have only put in an hour’s stint! Surely, the wages earned should have been calculated proportionally and according to merit, what is deserved. It’s outrageous! “It’s not fair!”

But of course, Jesus is telling this parable, and, he is describing the kingdom of heaven. Jesus used this very familiar scenario of workers gathering, waiting to be hired, working

honestly and then being paid their earnings accordingly and turned it upside down. It was transformed into a picture of what the Kingdom of God is **really** like. And it is **outrageously** different to what the Jews of his time thought it **must** be like. On hearing this parable, they would probably have been falling about laughing at the absurdity and foolishness of the landowner. It just didn't make sense! But Jesus is completely serious. In fact, he is being deliberately upsetting and disturbing. He is describing the very heart of God the Father and it challenges and reverses conventional values including the sense of what is fair. It is not what they had imagined at all.....

Jesus is illustrating that the love of God is not something that can be earned or gained on merit. It is not something that we receive from him based on a calculation in relation to how good we are, how hard we work or how long we have been working for the Lord. It is not based on a human economy of what is deemed to be right, just and fair. The love of God is unreasonably, outrageously, foolishly and generously lavished upon us all.....whatever our creed or colour, whatever our background or past experience, whatever our weaknesses and imperfections. We call this, **the grace of God**. The unmerited and undeserving favour of God, freely offered to us all in equal and outrageous abundance. And the grace of God cannot be earned, **only received** because God is so glad to give it. The grace of God is not exclusive only to people who are good, who never make mistakes, who never fall into temptation. The grace of God is for the weak, the broken and the imperfect like me. God's grace floods our days in the desert with streams of living water. God's grace is an ocean without a shoreline. God's grace is persistent and powerful. The grace of God doesn't turn away from us, rather turns towards us. Even when we feel discouraged by our mistakes or think we are no good or have nothing to offer, the grace of God comes looking for us. **Looking for us** just as the landowner repeatedly, outrageously and persistently kept returning to the marketplace to seek out more workers to hire and lavish with abundant generosity.

The grace of God does not hold any record of wrongs, nor hold any grudges. The grace of God wipes the slate clean. The grace of God never gives up on us. It is perfectly undeserving. It is the source of rich blessings and new beginnings. It is the gift of reconciliation, redemption and restoration. It is the source of peace and joy. And it is available to all, whoever we are, in equal abundance.

Maybe next time we found ourselves thinking, "It's just not fair!" May we be reminded of the outrageously, undeserving generosity of the grace of God. And with humble and repentant hearts, receive, in all its fullness, God's grace, God's amazing grace. **Amen.**

### **Mini testimonies of God's grace**

#### **Ennis Tweddle**

I have always been aware of God's love, holding me and keeping me. Long before I had any instruction in the bible or knowledge of Jesus, I felt cradled in arms bigger than any human could possibly have. As a child I was very ill, I was not expected to live, but the very first thing God did was to give me into a poor, but very loving family. My parents were true reflections of sacrificial love. Throughout my life, this pattern of God's, giving me the right person to support and guide at my times of need has continued. Through these people He has guided me away from danger, along the path he has chosen and has gifted me with many blessings. It is only His continued constant love that enables me now , through the gift of reflection, to begin to appreciate the depth, the richness, the constancy

and the sacrifice of His love. I am filled with a thankfulness and joy my words cannot fully express.

### **Mary Murray**

I was born into a family of unbelievers and lived without God until I was in my early thirties. One day he came to me and lovingly brought me into faith as he gently pursued me, rebuked me and changed me through his grace, bringing me wise and faithful people on my learning journey. Because of his endless generosity, I have freedom and renewal through forgiveness; a peace which comes from Christ when I learn to trust in him; and an unwavering love like no other, poured out unconditionally.

### **Andrew Wilson**

51 Years ago I became a Christian, (something I would strongly recommend to everyone) and over the years I have found through my relationship with the Lord Jesus that He is at work not just in the things I do at Church but in every part of my life.

Where there is a need I find Jesus through his abundant love and grace ready to help me, I do not have to worry or fear but trust and be obedient to his will. As the Bible says 'In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.'

I have many examples of God's action in my life but one example that stands out is this: 26 years ago, I felt God calling me to change my farming enterprise from sheep to dairy cows as more income was needed when in the next few years James, my son would work with me on the farm. I found it was almost impossible to enter the dairy farming industry, because of the high price of Quota's, (ie the right to produce milk) but was not put off knowing it to be God's will for my life and 'with God all things are possible.' Starting milking in 1994 the dairy industry went through an extremely volatile time with many established dairy businesses having to sell up – but, miraculously through his abundant kindness Jesus brought us through and as many of you know today we are still milking cows.

Thanks be to God!

### **Susan Wilson**

As a child I went to Church every week with my parents.

In my early 20's I Came to York and it was here at the Church I attended that God spoke to me through the Preacher's words in the sermons each week. I was questioning what the Bible verses meant and by the grace of God I came to commit my life to Christ. That was the start of something special! Not only were several of our student group Christians at that time and we were able to grow together in our Christian journey but God blessed me so much because at this same Church I met my future husband who was also a Christian. God is so generous and we have been blessed time and time again in our journey of faith together. I believe God has a plan for our lives and though it may not be the path we expect to follow, I have seen God direct us both so many times.

We are able to pray together, God hears our prayers and answers not always in the ways we expect.

5 years ago I retired from Community nursing, I was praying God would guide me as to where I should work or volunteer next. The week I was due to finish I was surprisingly offered a post as a Staff Nurse in the Out Patients Department, something I had never ever considered before but I accepted the offer and thoroughly enjoyed working there for the next 5 years.

Life isn't always easy but God gives us the strength to face whatever comes and in trusting Him and following him we find peace and contentment.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord, we come together today as your people in Jesus Christ, Your Son. Help us to know that you want us to live in harmony with you and with one another. Because of the threat of Corona virus in our lives, many of our churches remain empty, but help us to remember, Lord, that there are no barriers which stop us from communicating with You. The difficulties which we have encountered during this time have hopefully helped us to discover a deeper love, trust and faith in you, and in one another. We can pray with you anytime, but these Sunday services will hopefully have made us feel even closer to You and each other. We ask that our prayers may draw us to you, and help us to experience the joy of worshipping You, our God. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Matthew reminds us that we are all of equal worth in Your sight, dear Lord. We pray that You will equip us with the same grace, love and foresight in our dealings with each other, and that our interaction may not be hindered by race, creed, colour or inclination. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

At this time of year, schools have been slowly trying to return. The classroom settings have changed, and many activities within the curriculum will have altered. We thank all those in education who have had such a thankless task in trying to accommodate our children's return to the classroom. It has not been easy. We pray that pupils will return with the same energy and enthusiasm which they have always had, and that all the changes will enable our schools to continue to flourish. Thank you Lord for our schools and all places of learning, and for everyone who works in them: -teachers who facilitate learning, dinner staff who prepare food, and the caretakers who clean up at the end of each day. Help our young people to realise how fortunate they are, that from nursery to university, they are able to receive an education, even in these difficult times, when there are many in the world who cannot. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord we pray for this, Your world, and its peoples with all their needs. We give thanks for the world wide Christian Church in all its wonderful diversity in the service of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Especially we pray for those communities who meet together in difficult and dangerous circumstances. Let them feel Your all-abiding presence to uphold their courage, and to strengthen their faith.

We give thanks in Your sight, Lord, for the skill, devotion and tenacity of all the health workers who make such sacrifices (often the ultimate), to protect us from Corona virus. Give us wisdom and strength to play our part in defeating this disease, whenever we are required to make our own personal sacrifices. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for Your healing strength to be given to those who are sick at this time, and for Your love for those who are facing grief at the loss of a loved one. Now let us share a moment of silence together as we bring before You those known only to ourselves and to You. Let them feel Your presence as we name them in our hearts.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer**

## **Song**

Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And Grace my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares  
I have already come.  
'Tis Grace hath brought me safe thus far  
And Grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me.  
His Word my hope secures.  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.

## **Blessing**

May the abundance and richness of the amazing grace of God fill your hearts and minds with His peace and love.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, and those whom we love. Now and for evermore.

**Amen.**