

**The Lord answers our prayers in unexpected ways!**

Isaiah 55:6-9

Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

Philippians 1:20c-24,27a

Matthew 20:1-16a

In the first reading Isaiah reminds everyone to call and seek the Lord while he may be found. Scoundrels must forsake their ways, their wicked thoughts, and turn to God for mercy before it is too late. The Lord is generous and forgiving and his ways and thoughts are high above ours.

The Psalmist describes the Lord as great, unsearchable, slow to anger, good to all, just in all his ways, compassionate, kind, holy in all his works, and always near to all who call upon him in truth. The Lord is to be continually praised.

In the second reading Paul notes that while he still lives it is Christ who will be magnified by his actions. He longs to depart this life but remains for the benefit of the community which is advised to conduct itself in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.

In the Gospel Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in terms of a story of people hired to work in a vineyard. At day's end the latecomers are given the same pay as those hired early in the morning, and there is a grumbling of why this should be. The landowner's response was direct: "Are you envious because I am generous?"

Our communion with the Father  
Is revealed in the Son  
With life in the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Isaiah points to God's ways that are higher than anything we can even imagine, unsearchable things as the psalmist says. Jesus tells a story with a most unexpected ending that riles many hard-working people. Why should more be given to those who did less? Perhaps we are asked to realize that oftentimes opportunities are not readily available to many people and those that start late can accomplish much and their contributions are necessary pieces to the puzzle of life. However, this is not a reason to let opportunities slide because there is always danger that we may let something precious slip our grasp, something that may never arise again.

In the parable there is no injustice by the landowner and the latecomers are not accused in any way of being lazy and these aspects avoid the intrusion of morality into the story. Imagine if you will a normal work situation where the normal expectation is completely turned topsy-turvy. The master is not extremely generous for he could have increased the pay of the early starters, but what he does is to simply violate expectations, and what the first workers "thought" would happen did not. One source of frustration we seldom recognize is expecting too much of others, or expecting specifically what they ought to do, say, be, and give according to our rationale.



If I expect a person to behave and react in a certain way in a given situation and my expectations are not met, have I the right to be upset and angry? It is wisdom to stop expecting and gently get into the mood of acceptance as it is expecting too much that brings frustrations and disappointments. Perhaps I too sometimes fail to live up to the expectations of others.

When Jesus taught in parables his examples were often based on real life observations, sometimes from his work as a carpenter and builder, or observing farmers at work sowing seeds. In this way his teaching resonated with the listeners who could relate to everyday happenings. We all come from different work situations whether truck driver, engineer, lawyer, laborer, farmer, etc. and so, we too may come to surprising realizations based on our everyday work.

I find that math and science examples can often remind us that what seems obvious may not necessarily be so. For example, if we drop a bowling ball and a small glass marble from a rooftop, we would not expect them to hit bottom at the same time. (As a matter of fact, a bowling ball and a feather would fall together if they were in a vacuum.) If people were placed at different heights, along a long hill and each let go of a bowling ball simultaneously you would rightly expect them to reach bottom at different times and generally this is true. However, there is a particular case where a unique hill shape results in their reaching bottom simultaneously. In a similar way the pay given to the workers in the Gospel is a unique situation, one that gives hope to all that wherever they are in life they are redeemable.



## **The Tautochrone Vineyard**

The parable of the land owner (Matthew 20:1-16) concerns the idea that all hired workers, no matter what time they started, ended up with the same pay at the end of the day. In other words, the landowner decided that all contributions were somehow comparable so that in his eyes the least times were equal to the greater ones and rewarded all of them equally, much to the consternation of some who expected more. But no doubt that those hired last worked extra hard in appreciation of the unique opportunity given by the creative landowner.

This parable is likened to the kingdom of heaven and gives hope especially to those who suddenly find conversion in the twilight of life and are despairing about those many unproductive years. The last verse of this parable notes: "Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last." Most likely this too leads to stunning surprises in the Kingdom, however, to use this parable as an excuse to delay acceptance will reap only a bitter harvest.

This reminds me of the Tautochrone problem in mathematics as a metaphor for this parable. "Tautochrone" comes from the Greek *tauto* for "the same" (which also gives us "tautology") and *chronos* for "time." The problem posed in the 1600's involved finding the curve down which an object can slide from any point to the bottom (accelerated by gravity and ignoring friction), always in the same length of time.

[http://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/T/tautochrone\\_problem.html](http://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/T/tautochrone_problem.html)

<https://melkaplace.com>