



GOD'S WORD FOR THIS WEEK 18th September 2020

*Picture:
The Red Vineyard
Vincent Van Gogh*

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY (the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity)

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:

Grant that your people may be fervent
in the fellowship of the gospel;
that, always abiding in you,
they may be found steadfast in faith
and active in service;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE FIRST READING

Exodus 16: 2-15

²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' ⁶So Moses and Aaron said

to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' ⁸And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we?



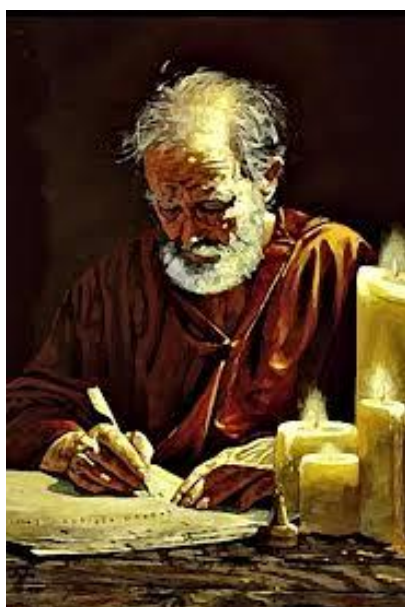
Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, “Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.”’¹⁰ And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.¹¹ The Lord spoke to Moses and said, ¹²‘I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, “At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.”’¹³ In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.



Reflect

Is there no end to God's patience with us?!
The Israelite people can hardly be blamed for wishing themselves back in captivity in comparison to the wilderness and hunger that now faces them. They are quick to complain to Moses and Aaron, blaming them for bringing them into worse conditions than they left and yet, hearing their complaints, God responds by providing for their needs in order that they believe in him! This begs the next question - **Is there no end to the bounds of love that God has for us?!**

Sometimes we fail to see the bigger picture because we become enmeshed in our present situation. Perhaps today is a reminder of God's bigger plan and of his constant care and request that we trust in him.



THE EPISTLE Philippians 1: 21-30

²¹For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

The depths of Paul's faith are remarkable! Here is a man who has been so deeply touched by his encounter with Christ that he seeks more than anything to be with Jesus. Yet he knows that his responsibility is to the growing Christian communities on earth. He urges them (as his words urge us today) to remain firm in one spirit and one mind for the faith of the Gospel. It is a comfort to him to know that, even if he can't reach these communities himself, they will stand on their own in their unity of faith. Paul's words resound with new meaning in our communities of faith today!

THE GOSPEL

Matthew 20: 1-16

20¹For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage,* he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" ⁷They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.* ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.* ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." ¹³But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?" ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"* ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.*



Reflect

The Owner of the Vineyard does not fall short of his agreement with the workers hired for the longest time. Their disgruntlement is due to the fact that they are comparing their working hours with others' and in doing so their gratitude for the day's work is turned to resentment. The Owner is quick to show them that he works from a place of mercy and that they are objecting not to injustice but to generosity!

If this parable is an example of the Kingdom of God and God himself as the Owner of the Kingdom, look anew at what this parable tells us about God's mercy and inclusivity and the different way he operates these qualities. Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son as a good example of this.



THE PSALM 105

1 O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD AND CALL UPON HIS NAME; ♦
MAKE KNOWN HIS DEEDS AMONG THE PEOPLES.
2 SING TO HIM, SING PRAISES, ♦
AND TELL OF ALL HIS MARVELLOUS WORKS.
3 REJOICE IN THE PRAISE OF HIS HOLY NAME; ♦
LET THE HEARTS OF THEM REJOICE WHO SEEK THE LORD.
4 SEEK THE LORD AND HIS STRENGTH; ♦
SEEK HIS FACE CONTINUALLY.
5 REMEMBER THE MARVELS HE HAS DONE, ♦
HIS WONDERS AND THE JUDGEMENTS OF HIS MOUTH,
6 O SEED OF ABRAHAM HIS SERVANT, ♦
O CHILDREN OF JACOB HIS CHOSEN.
37 THEN HE BROUGHT THEM OUT WITH ♦ SILVER AND GOLD; ♦
THERE WAS NOT ONE AMONG THEIR TRIBES THAT STUMBLED.
38 EGYPT WAS GLAD AT THEIR DEPARTING, ♦
FOR A DREAD OF THEM HAD FALLEN UPON THEM.
39 HE SPREAD OUT A CLOUD FOR A COVERING
AND A FIRE TO LIGHT UP THE NIGHT.
40 THEY ASKED AND HE BROUGHT THEM QUAILS; ♦
HE SATISFIED THEM WITH THE BREAD OF HEAVEN.
41 HE OPENED THE ROCK, AND THE WATERS GUSHED OUT ♦
AND RAN IN THE DRY PLACES LIKE A RIVER.
42 FOR HE REMEMBERED HIS HOLY WORD ♦
AND ABRAHAM, HIS SERVANT.
43 SO HE BROUGHT FORTH HIS PEOPLE WITH JOY, ♦
HIS CHOSEN ONES WITH SINGING.
44 HE GAVE THEM THE LANDS OF THE NATIONS ♦
AND THEY TOOK POSSESSION OF THE FRUIT OF THEIR TOIL,
45 THAT THEY MIGHT KEEP HIS STATUTES ♦
AND FAITHFULLY OBSERVE HIS LAWS.
ALLELUIA.

