



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (20th September) 2026

The parable at the heart of this morning's Gospel reading captures something of the enduring nature of the human character. I would think that down the centuries, debates and complaints about the supposedly unfair allocation of rewards and resources have been as countless as the grains of sand on the seashore.

However, insofar as Jesus is addressing the issue of fairness, we might infer that the conceptual framework in which human beings contemplate fairness is rather different from that of the perspective of the divine Will and Purpose. Equally, the story illustrates something more than a means of judging what is fair: it offers us an insight into outworking of that divine Will and Purpose in the life of the Church.

There is a hint that this is the case when, recognising that the remuneration of the workers represents the attainment of life eternal in Heaven, we reflect that the experience of redemption is indivisible and un-nuanced - either you are redeemed or you are not; there is no club-class in Heaven; and, therefore, any notions that might be extrapolated from the longer serving workers that the later arrivals should receive less does not translate into the allocation of a place in His nearer Presence.

In earthly terms, every path of overt faith is different: for some it will be lifelong - the cradle Christian as it is sometimes described - whilst others only embrace that faith near the ends of their earthly lives - even occasionally on their deathbeds. We cannot know why it pleases God that one is called from birth whilst another only finds faith later in life.

However, there might be something of a clue to understanding when we reflect that waiting is not an inert experience. In the parable, those who are employed later in the day are portrayed as waiting around; but we should not suppose that they are unresponsive to their situation. They are making themselves available for work, because they need the money. As the hours pass, we might imagine that they become increasingly desperate that they will earn nothing that day and that they and any who might depend on them will go hungry. The delay in finding employment would make them even more eager when the moment of invitation finally came.

The fact that for those who come to the Faith later in life some of their journey to that point has been undertaken outside the life of the Church does not mean that what went before their formal embrace of Faith was irrelevant to or unconnected with the life that they will have within the company of the Church. It is those experiences, which have brought them to the point when they wish to commit themselves to a life of discipleship.

Finally, we might observe that these later comers in the parable are needed. At the beginning of the day either the landowner has underestimated the amount of work that needs to be done or the people he first employed have not worked as hard as he had supposed that they would. Either way, the task will not be completed without the additional workers.

Of course, we cannot propose that God misjudges the needs of the Church; but never-the-less, we can easily accept that there is always room for more disciples in the life of the Church: there is never a point in earthly history when we can say that we have sufficient to fulfil our mission: either in terms of sheer numbers or in the range of skills and capacities available to our continuing and developing work. Rather than seeking to adjudicate fairness on the basis that some come later to the party than others, we should be glad when more arrive to share in the task.