

Worship at Home – 20 September 2026

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, prepared by Mary Armstrong.

Introduction

Jesus tells a parable about the owner of a vineyard. The owner is concerned to hire as many workers as possible, all through the day, and then pays all his workers the same, irrespective of when they started work. The kingdom of heaven is like this; no one gets more or less than anyone else, everyone belongs and each receives in equal measure.

Call to worship

Only by grace can we enter,
Only by your love are we enabled to worship you, O God,
Only because of your love for us, can we share your love with the world.
Accept our worship today, we pray.
Amen

Hymn: StF 565¹ *Only by grace can we enter...*

Only by grace can we enter,
only by grace can we stand ;
not by our human endeavour,
but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us,
you call us to come.
Into your presence you draw us,
and now by your grace we come,
now by your grace we come.

Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
who would stand ?
Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.
Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
who would stand ?
Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.
Only by grace can we enter ...

Gerrit Gustafson

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Opening prayers

Our Gospel reading today, which as I said is that challenging parable from Matthew 20:1.16 about the workers in the vineyard, reminds us to pray for Harvests across the world that God has provided, and also to give thanks for the food we have, and for shelter and for relationships.

As we bring our prayers of gratitude today, we know that not everyone in the world, perhaps not even everyone in our own community, have so many things for which they feel grateful; life is not always fair or easy. We pray that there would be more equality and love, both in the wider world and closer to home.

Help us to be mindful of God's grace, and know that we are loved just as we are, loved for who we are, and that there is grace and love enough for each one of us, for the workers who arrive at the start of the day and for the ones who don't arrive until the end.

We are sorry Lord when we are judgemental and unforgiving. When we don't say or do things to make this world a better place, when we say or do things that we should have thought twice about, help us to remember, even in those moments that we are loved and forgiven.

As we celebrate the bounty in the world, the fruits of the earth, help us also celebrate and give thanks for the fruits of your spirit, those gifts you have given to each and every one of us to enrich this world, help us embrace all we have to offer and work towards making this world a better place.

Amen

Bible 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. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius^[a] for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ 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?’

⁷ ““Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸ “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.’

⁹ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘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.’

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Hymn: StF 530² *To be in your presence...*

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| 1 To be in your presence,
to sit at your feet,
where your love surrounds me,
and makes me complete :
<i>This is my desire, O Lord,
this is my desire.</i> | <i>This is my desire, O Lord,
this is my desire.</i>

2 To rest in your presence,
not rushing away,
to cherish each moment —
here I would stay. |
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Noël Richards (b. 1955)

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Reflection on the reading

In the United Kingdom, employment law rightly seeks to ensure that workers are treated fairly. Employers are expected to pay at least the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage, prevent discrimination, and honour the terms of employment. If two people do the same job under the same conditions, we naturally expect them to be treated fairly and paid accordingly. Justice in the workplace matters, and rightly so.

It might be helpful to keep this in mind when trying to understand this parable from Jesus. We can often take offence at the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. Workers who laboured all day received exactly the same wage as those who worked only the final hour. We can almost hear the early workers protesting, "That's not fair!"

But, and here is the difference, Jesus is not giving a lesson on employment law or workplace rights. He is teaching us something far more fundamental about the Kingdom of God. The landowner represents God, and the wage represents his grace. Grace is not earned by the number of hours we have worked, the length of time we have been Christians, or the sacrifices we have made. Grace is God's free and generous gift to all who come to him.

This passage reminds us that God's Kingdom operates on the principle of grace rather than human merit. Whether someone has followed Christ for a lifetime or has only just come to faith, the gift of salvation is the same. Instead of comparing ourselves with others or questioning God's generosity, we are invited to rejoice that his mercy is abundant, his welcome is wide, and his love is freely given to all who respond to his call.

How easily we compare our gifts, opportunities, ministries, or blessings with those of others. Such comparisons can rob us of joy and blind us to God's goodness in our own lives. Instead of celebrating God's generosity to others, we can become resentful.

Jesus invites us to rejoice in a God whose grace is abundant, generous, and freely given. He delights in welcoming those who come to Him, whether early or late. His Kingdom is not built on human merit but on divine mercy.

May we never take God's grace for granted, nor begrudge it when it is poured out on others. Instead, let us give thanks that the same gracious Lord calls each of us into His vineyard and blesses us beyond what we deserve.

Amen.

Prayers for ourselves and for the world.

Lord, we pray for our communities, our nation, and our world. We remember places where there is conflict instead of peace, injustice instead of compassion, hunger instead of plenty, and fear instead of hope. We pray that you would motivate and challenge leaders to govern with wisdom, integrity, and humility. Inspire Your Church to be a witness of reconciliation, justice, generosity, and love, reflecting the compassion of Christ to all people. The effect of climate change is placing mounting pressure on food security and living standards. Lord, grant us the courage to be diligent stewards of your creation and to work together to reverse the trend of climate change.

Lord, hear us - Lord, graciously hear us.

We thank You for the generosity of Your grace. Forgive us when we compare ourselves with others or fail to rejoice in the blessings You have given them. Help us to remember that all we have comes from You, and teach us to be generous with our time, our gifts, and our resources, just as You have been generous towards us.

Lord, hear us - Lord, graciously hear us

Finally, we present our own needs to you. We pray that you will meet us at our point of need and bless us with your comforting presence and peace. Grant us the grace to be worthy disciples and sustain us in the days ahead. Now in a moment of quiet we bring to you the people and situations that worry and concern us at the moment.

Lord, hear us - Lord, graciously hear us.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen

Let's say together the prayer that Jesus gave us

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your Name
Your kingdom comes
Your will be done
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, Now and for ever.
Amen

Hymn: StF 455³ *All my hope on God is founded...*

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| <p>1 All my hope on God is founded ;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.</p> <p>2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust ;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.</p> <p>3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought ;
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of nought.</p> | <p>Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.</p> <p>4 Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow ;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand ;
joy doth wait on his command.</p> <p>5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.</p> |
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Robert Bridges (1844–1930) (*alt.*)

based on Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

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Blessing

God, send us out as workers in your vineyard,
to do whatever you call us to do,
to do it fairly and without favour,
so that all may share in your harvest of generosity.
Amen.

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