

Justice in Matthew Gospel

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Notes for Participants

Workers in Vineyard Matthew 20:1-16

- ❖ An important point those who were hired first are paid last.
- ❖ V. 12 the workers voices what is puzzling in this parable.
- ❖ Does not justice demand that those who worked more earn more?
- ❖ The vineyard owner promised to pay what is just
- ❖ He asks “Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?” (v.15).

First Point

- ❖ If the landowner is a figure for God, his actions show that God’s generosity, which is freely lavished on those most in need.
- ❖ God’s generosity, is not injustice.
- ❖ The story *is* about people getting what they deserve.
- ❖ All have the right to eat for the day.
- ❖ It does not mean getting what we deserve, either in terms of retribution for wrongdoing or recompense for good deeds.

Second point

- ❖ Evil -eye” envy is the most destructive force in a community.
- ❖ The question in verse 15 is literally, Or is your eye evil that I am good?”
- ❖ In a first-century worldview of limited good, anyone’s gain means another one’s loss.
- ❖ While those who grumble focus on their perceived loss, they miss the limitless goodness and generosity of the landowner.
- ❖ Danger of riches: hoarding
- ❖ Attend to the needs of those who are in poverty.

Parable of Talents Matt: 25:14-30

- ❖ Often interpreted as an exhortation to use all one’s God-given gifts to the full.
- ❖ However, the Greek word *talanton* has no other connotation than a monetary unit or weight measurement.
- ❖ In the parable it denotes a very large sum of money.

Key to Understanding this Parable

- ❖ Jesus did not live in a capitalist system

- ❖ People had a sense of limited good: there is only so much wealth, and any increase in one person takes away from another.
- ❖ Those who amassed large amounts for themselves would be seen as greedy and wicked.
- ❖ If the master is not a figure for God, it is the third servant who is the honourable one.
- ❖ He refused to collaborate with his master in his unfettered greed.
- ❖ The parable warns rich people to stop exploiting those who are poor, and it encourages poor people to take courageous measures to expose greed for the sin that it is.
- ❖ It encourages disciples to find ways to stand together as they confront unjust systems.

Final Judgment 25: 31-46

- ❖ This is unique to Matthew's Gospel.
- ❖ The time of judgement has arrived as the Human One comes in his glory (v. 31)
- ❖ The scene is linked with 28:16-20, where Jesus instructs his followers to make disciples of all nations (28:19), a command that this parable presumes has been fulfilled.
- ❖ All nations (v. 32) are now assembled to render account.
- ❖ Sheep separated from goats, unclear both are valuable.

- ❖ Image of Jesus shifts from shepherd to king (v 34, see 2:2; 21:5).
- ❖ Like Moses, who laid out before the Israelites the choice of blessing or curse (Deut 11:26), Jesus separates those "blessed by my Father" (v 34) from those "accursed" (v 41).
- ❖ God's invitation goes out to all (5:45; 13:3-9), and the choice to accept or reject it rests with each.

Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of world Matt: 25:34

- ❖ The beauty of what has been created is in the middle of all that is destructive-egoism- indifference in our world.
- ❖ We need to become like Jesus, capable of denouncing the attitudes that kill, the practices that maintain unjust systems.
- ❖ A call to listen to clamour, the lament from those who are hungry, thirsty, sick or enslaved etc.
- ❖ The text does not highlight the beauty of creation nor of the human person rather it shows the vulnerability of what has been created and

how the human person can become misguided and provoke or sustain these situations horrific situations.

- ❖ Make a preferential option, which is urgent.

God identifies with those on Margins

- ❖ The text places importance on daily activity.
- ❖ Great transformations begin small.
- ❖ For us, Christians, the text culminates in a theological concept, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (25, 40).
- ❖ God identifies with the poor and insignificant (Bethlem manger, Galilea, cross). Not only practically but spiritually...

The Poor Today includes Planet Earth

- ❖ “Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.” (LS 93).
- ❖ Matthew 25 shows the way: look to the margins: the poor, nature, etc and we can see how the goods of this world are administered. Are they administered in a way that allows all of life to flourish?

I was a Stranger, and you Welcomed me”

- ❖ This is so evident today...and expresses a breakdown in community relationships.
- ❖ Stranger: those who are seeking a better way of life: who leave their country because of insecurity of war, famine, violence etc.
- ❖ From a Christian perspective: we know they are a privileged group in the bible alongside widows and orphans. Why?
- ❖ These were considered the groups who had no rights, and were vulnerable and open to exploitation.

- ❖ Dt 24, 14, Lev 19,34 Ephesians 2,19 Ex 22,21, y23,9 y psalm 146,9

- ❖ “There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever.” (LS 25).

- ❖ We know that hunger and thirst produces migration: those who end up as strangers on our shores.

I was Naked and you Gave me Clothing

- ❖ In the biblical tradition, clothing is synonymous with power and survival and nakedness is synonymous with powerlessness and death.
- ❖ Ex 22: 26-27 “If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; 27 for it may be your neighbour's

only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbour cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.”

- ❖ Today, we see many who are “naked” displaced from their homes, land, etc

Disposal culture

- ❖ “The economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment. Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked. LS 56.
- ❖ What does it mean today to give clothing?

You were Sick and you Visited me

- ❖ Today, we are witnessing new illnesses which are connected to the environment in which we live.
- ❖ Contamination of water and food, the quality of the air, Covid etc.
- ❖ Pharmaceutical Companies: (Pfizer made nearly \$37bn (£27bn) in sales from its Covid-19 in Feb 22– making it one of the most lucrative products in history – and has forecast another bumper year in 2022, with a big boost coming from its Covid-19 pill Paxlovid source: Guardian)
- ❖ Quality of healthcare systems: who is care for? Who gains?

I was in Prison and you Visited me

- ❖ The majority of those in prison are the poor:
- ❖ *Prisoners are 23 times more likely to come from (and return to) a seriously deprived area, compared to the least deprived areas (Irish Penal Trust).*
- ❖ “We risk being imprisoned in a justice that doesn't allow one to easily get back up again and confuses redemption with punishment.....It's right that those who have made a mistake pay for their mistake, but it's even more right that those who have done wrong should be able to redeem oneself from their mistake. There can't be sentences without windows of hope.”(Pope Francis)

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking: “The Council of Europe’s Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings ([GRETA](#)) has urged the authorities in Ireland to take further action against human trafficking, notably by

improving the prosecution of human traffickers and providing specialised shelters and compensation for victims” (September 2022).

Right Relationship

- ❖ We began with the statement “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (25:34)
- ❖ Restoration of right relationships: when you do it to one of the least you do it to me: unifying incarnation with historical practice of faith: the identification of Son of God with those who are on the margins, those who show us the way...where the priorities need to be to establish kingdom of God here on earth: integral vision.
- ❖ “An integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development” (LS 156-157).
- ❖ “Seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God” (LS 210).

Conversion is Needed

- ❖ This implies that we recognise our wrong doing and our sin, what we have neglected or omitted, that which offended God’s creation...all that God created and repent so that we can change.
- ❖ Conversion is necessary: this implies both change in our own habits as well as structural change, laws and economic order.
- ❖ It is for the long haul!

Jesus and the Stranger: who helps Jesus see differently

Canaanite Woman in the Gospel of Matthew 15:21-28

- ❖ Encounter between two cultures: Tension between Canaanites and the Israelites.
- ❖ The woman interacts with Jesus despite her ethnic, geographical or gender orientation.
- ❖ Interestingly, the woman knows the right Jewish prayer formula and proper messianic title for Jesus.
- ❖ She is seeking healing for her daughter. Jesus says nothing. No response.
- ❖ She is proactive, not silent.
- ❖ For the woman this was not just a window of opportunity rather she was ensuring it was a door for her to walk through.

- ❖ We are shocked that Jesus initially does not respond to her cry for mercy.
- ❖ When she pleads the second time Jesus' response is very insulting.
- ❖ She does not turn away, rather she redirects her hurt and finds a way to respond to Jesus, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs....."
- ❖ Something changes in Jesus. He recognises that she is correct, his vision has been too narrow.
- ❖ Jesus is confronted with his own ethnocentrism.
- ❖ He recognises her great faith...
- ❖ Jesus heals her daughter.
- ❖ The encounter with the woman was the catalyst that enabled Jesus to see differently and move towards a more inclusive practice.
- ❖ Jesus begins to remember who and what he is. He may be the Son of Man –fully human, culturally biased – but he is the Son of God.
- ❖ The Canaanite woman, with her inner strength and courage, transpires for Jesus the universality of God's love and healing.
- ❖ Jesus changes his mind His mission is now enlarged. Mercy has no limits.
- ❖ Canaanite woman might help women to insist that all deserve to be more fully fed by hearing female voices as well as male interpret Scriptures in the preached word, and by receiving bread blest and broken from female hands as well as male.

Two other examples of Jesus and the Stranger

A centurion pleading for his slave (Matt 8:5-13), and a tax collector named Matthew (9:9-13).

Works used in the presentation:

1. The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century (3rd fully Revised Edition), Eds. John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid OP & Donal Senior CP, t&tClark (London, 2020).
2. The Gospel According to Matthew, Barbara E. Reid, New Collegeville Biblical Commentary, Liturgical Press (Minnesota, 2005).
3. Women's Bible Commentary Revised and Updated, Eds Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, WJK (Kentucky, 2012).
4. Habitat, Human, and Holy: An Eco-Rhetorical Reading of the Gospel of Matthew, Elaine M. Wainwright, The Earth Bible Commentary Series 6, Sheffield Phoenix Press (Sheffield, 2016).
5. Francis, 2015. Encyclical letter Laudato si' of the Holy Father Francis. 1st ed. [Vatican City]