

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer,
Sustainer, Amen

A fragile economy , a vulnerable workforce , a powerful inconsistent man at the top. Sound familiar ? Jesus is speaking to people with personal experience of hardship, who know all about the whims of a ruling elite. Just before telling this parable Jesus had insisted, against his disciples wishes, on scooping up children from the background in the crowd , moving small unregarded individuals into prominence saying **“let the children alone. Don’t try to stop them coming to me. Heaven’s domain is for children such as these”**. Jesus then went on to confound a privileged young man who asked about the route to eternal life. Jesus in his answer disparaged personal riches and told his

disciples **“I swear to you it is very difficult for the rich to enter heaven’s domain”**.

Matthew is showing us Jesus ushering in a transformed society with radically different, totally reversed social and economic principles. Teaching about God’s kingdom Jesus is saying that children are very near heaven and that rich people are very far away . **“The first shall be last and the last shall be first “** the words that end today’s gospel echo what Jesus said in the previous chapter - **‘many of the first will be last and of the last many will be first.’**”

Today’s vineyard parable, unique to Matthew, reveals what must be reversed in the status quo in order to give life to dispossessed people. Regardless of what they were paid, all the

workers went home seeing clearly the vast gulf existing between the landowner and themselves. They felt envious, divided and alienated. In Heaven's domain the power of one person to divide, rule and exploit will be taken away.

In Hebrew scriptures, the vineyard of Israel belongs to God, as does all land. When the man in this story assumes ownership of the vineyard he is usurping God's place. He flaunts his power to do as he wills, denying the labourers the right to question his decision. The landowner refers to land acquired from peasants as "what belongs to me". The proper order of things has been reversed by his acquisitive scheming. The landowner reveals he has the power to choose what to do with that which is his (land which he has taken from others)

though choosing is something predominantly ascribed to God. He then declares himself to be good. Jesus has just told the rich young man that only God is good.

Those who heard Jesus tell this story and Matthew's later audience would know not all vineyard owners represent the divine. They would also know about rudimentary trade unions - voluntary associations in the roman world where individuals had the voice of a group if they needed to protest about working conditions. The workers in this parable were only interested in receiving their own payment, not in whether other workers had enough to feed their families.

Paul swithers today about whether it is better to be in heaven with Jesus or alongside people

he cares about. The language he uses encourages congregations to get politically engaged in the world of the market place. Community responsibility, solidarity and equal sharing of resources is a given, constantly woven throughout the New Testament and Hebrew Scriptures. King David insisted : **The share of the one who goes down into the battle shall be the same as the share of the one who stays by the baggage : they shall all share alike”.**

All sharing alike. We ave an opportunity now to work together for economic transformation, for a fairer distribution of resources - For a reversal of unearned entitlement.. For rejection of consumerism and the pursuit of endless growth or all our sakes and for the sake of our planet as we see God’s gracious

provision for the needs of every creature being disrupted .

In taking up our community responsibility we join in the work of Heaven's economics - based on love, and generosity not on the movement of wealth from the poor to the rich.

Amen