***JANUARY REFLECTION 2024***

***Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.***

***Invocation*** *(Make the sign of the cross as the leader prays the invocation.)*

Leader: *+ Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*

***All: for they will be satisfied.***

*Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.*

***All: As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

***Psalm 17 (pray antiphonally)***

***Hear, LORD, my plea for justice;***

***pay heed to my cry;***

***Listen to my prayer***

***from lips without guile.***

***From you let my vindication come;***

***your eyes see what is right.***

***You have tested my heart,***

***searched it in the night.***

***You have tried me by fire,***

***but find no malice in me.***

***My mouth has not transgressed***

***as others often do.***

***As your lips have instructed me,***

***I have kept from the way of the lawless.***

***My steps have kept to your paths;***

***my feet have not faltered.***

***I call upon you; answer me, O God.***

***Turn your ear to me; hear my speech.***

***Show your wonderful mercy,***

***you who deliver with your right arm***

***those who seek refuge from their foes.***

***Keep me as the apple of your eye;***

***hide me in the shadow of your wings***

***from the wicked who despoil me.***

***I am just—let me see your face;***

***when I awake, let me be filled with your presence.***

***Scripture*** *“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard.* *After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.* *Going out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace,**and he said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.’* *So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o’clock, and did likewise.* *Going out about five o’clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’* *They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard.’*

*When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.’* *When those who had started about five o’clock came, each received the usual daily wage.* *So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage.* *And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner,* *saying, ‘These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day’s burden and the heat.’* *He said to one of them in reply, ‘My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?**Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you?* *Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?’**Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

*Matthew 20:1-16*

**(Pause for a few moments to meditate on the reading.)**

### ***Reflection A parable of unfairness***

*In Matthew 20 is the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Some men worked all day long in the heat of the day. Some worked only half a day, and some worked only one hour, but they all got paid the same amount, a day’s wage. Some got exactly what they agreed to, but others got more. However, the men who worked all day long said, “That’s not fair. We worked all day long, and it’s not fair to pay us the same as those who worked less” (verse 12). But the men who worked all day got exactly what they had agreed to before they began work (verse 4). The only reason they got upset was because other people got more than they deserved.*

*What did the paymaster say? He said: “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (verse 15). The boss said he would give them a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work, and that’s what he did—and yet the workers complained. Why? Because they compared themselves with others and they got the shorter end of the stick. They got their hopes up, and then they were disappointed.*

*How would you react to this? What would you think if your boss gave a bonus to the newest employees, but not to the old faithful workers? It would not be very good for morale, would it? But Jesus was not giving us payroll advice here—he was telling a parable about the kingdom of God (verse 1). But the landowner said: “I am doing you no wrong. If you think it’s not fair, the problem is in what you expected, not in what you actually got. If it hadn’t been for the amount I paid the newcomers, you would be quite happy with what I gave you. The problem is in your expectations, not in what I did. You accuse me of being bad, simply because I was good to someone else (verse 15).*

*The parable reflected something that was happening in Jesus’ ministry. God was giving salvation to people who hadn’t worked very hard, and the religious leaders said: “That’s not fair. You can’t be generous to them. We’ve been working hard, and they have hardly been working.” And Jesus replied, “I am bringing good news to sinners, not to the righteous.” His teaching threatened to undermine the normal motive for doing good.*

### ***Where do we fit in?***

*We might like to think that we have worked all day long, bearing the burdens and the heat of the day, deserving a good reward. But we have not. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been in the church or how many sacrifices you have made; those are nothing in comparison to what God is giving us. Paul worked harder than any of us; he made more sacrifices for the gospel than we realize, but he counted it all as a loss for Christ. It was nothing.*

*We are really like the workers who worked only one hour and got a whole day’s wage. We just barely got started, and we were paid like we actually did something useful. Is that fair? Maybe we shouldn’t even ask the question. If the judgment is in our favor, we shouldn’t ask for another evaluation!*

*The time we’ve spent in the church is nothing to God. The work we’ve done is nothing compared to what he can do. Even at our best, as another parable says, we are unprofitable servants (*[*Luke 17:10*](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2017.10)*). Jesus has bought our entire lives; he has fair claim on every thought and every action. We cannot possibly give him anything on top of that—even if we do everything he commands.*

*Do we think of ourselves as people who have worked long and hard? Do we think we deserve more than we are getting? Or do we see ourselves as people who are getting an undeserved gift, regardless of how long we’ve worked?*

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***Prayer Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it:
a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;
a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them; a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect; a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love. Give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

***Sign of the Cross***

