

When I was in Timboon I got an emergency call to be with a dying parishioner's husband who was in hospital in Melbourne. When I got there, I spent some time with him, and started to talk to him about his impending death. I asked him if he wanted to make his confession and his communion. He wryly smiled at me and said that it would be a bit like crawling at the last minute to God and he would feel like a hypocrite. I simply smiled back at him and shared this scripture with him, and simply explained that the only tragedy in this would be if he died without making peace with God. I simply said to him that God has been waiting patiently like the Father in the prodigal Son story waiting for his return.

On hearing that he perked up, made his confession and made his communion with his daughter in attendance.

I left that room and never saw him again. At the funeral about a week later his wife told me that when they all went into the room they saw before them a transformed man. His face was glowing and he was truly at peace. I never saw that, but I was not surprised that such an event had happened in his life.

She asked me what happened to cause such a change in him that was obvious to the family and friends gathered to say good by to him. I simply told her what had transpired, and the joy and delight that was on her face and in her tears of joy will live with me to the day I die.

This gospel passage is told by Jesus to the people of the day to serve as a very important reminder to the people that who is in and out of the kingdom of God is ultimately up to God.

Here in this market place it is not about people actively seeking work, it is simply people making themselves available to be hired. The owner of the vineyard, who in the story is God, is actively seeking people to come and be involved and reap the reward for the work done in the vineyard.

This story is not about good employment practices, it is not about the right way to conduct industrial relations, it is about the goodness of the vineyard owner and his actions in repaying those who respond to his call to come and be involved in what he is on about.

The point of the parable that Jesus tells has three facets to it, yet the three lessons are also intertwined. The first lesson is that as long as we are willing to respond no matter how late the offer might be we can be involved in what God is doing.

This opportunity is predicated on the assumption that although people might not know that they are open to God, they are predisposed to him. The people in the market place were looking for work. They were not sure what they would get, but they were predisposed to working once an offer, any offer was made to them. My parishioner's husband was predisposed to responding to God. He was not antagonistic, he simply didn't think that he was worthy of responding to God seeing it had been such a long time in coming. One can assume that the market place was not cleared of workers after each foray by the owner looking for workers. So it could be safe to assume that some simply take a bit longer to respond than others. What is most important is that they respond.

This leads on to the second lesson. There will come a time when the offer will lapse. The men hired at the eleventh hour were the last to be

hired. There was no more opportunities when the end of the day came and the accounts with the workers were settled. This is a stark reminder to us that we must not tarry in our response to God.

The owner of the vineyard, God, is constantly on the look out for people to work for him. He needs us to be involved. Although he could do it all himself he chooses to involve us in the process, and to reap the rewards of the process of being involved in the world of God, being involved in the kingdom.

The final lesson Jesus has for the hearers, are for those who think of themselves as the first respondents to the invitation to come and work for God. If these people think that they will get any special treatment they are mistaken, for the special treatment is that everyone gets rewarded for responding to God and doing what he asks of us.

So what does all this mean? How can this have any bearing for us here in Gordon? Well I think it does.

Where are we at in our relationship with God? Have we responded to his call on our lives? Have we responded to his invitation to work for him in his kingdom? It is not just enough to come to church. We need to be involved.

This means more than just one hour a week in church. It is about being involved in the life of the church and being an integral part of the mission of the church here in Gordon. It is not about being up front and being obvious, but it is about being involved, willing to do our part, from daily prayer asking for renewal in this place all the way through to leadership roles, and everything in between. Remember this parable is directed to people he was familiar with. The people were all, presumably, Jewish workers and therefore supposedly people of God, yet Jesus seems to be challenging this all encompassing suggestion. He seems to be saying to us don't be complacent. He seems to be saying that he needs active people, not those simply sitting around. He has much to do, many people to reach and he needs our assistance, in whatever way we can, not matter how trivial it may seem to us it is important to God.

The last thing he seems to be saying to us here, is do not despise those who are new in your work force, or in our case in our congregation.

Their inheritance is exactly the same as the rest of ours. There are many who have labored long and hard in this place through great trial and tribulation, but all who find themselves working in this place will receive the same inheritance, eternal life.

They need to be allowed to work, and find their place here, just as those who have been here forever need to be able to have a meaningful and fulfilling role in the congregation.

Still we may ask ourselves, so what? The so what is we have just spent some weeks reflecting on what it means to have God come to us in human form, to take on our humanity and give it a new purpose, dignity and direction. Then we have spent some time reflecting on what it means to be an epiphany people. Last week in that reflection for the 930 congregation I looked at the words of Jesus as he identified his mission to announce freedom to captives, pronounce the year of the Lord's favor, etc. If that is all true and real then our only response can be to embrace the lessons of this passage today.

Those lessons are, be available for the purposes of God, respond to the invitation to God, and welcome those he calls into our midst as co workers with us in the mission he has before us all.

We stand today about 70 days before the great day of Easter, the time when our redemption, our renewal, and our full purpose in God achieves its zenith. Let us start today in that Endeavour, so when we reach Easter, we may truly rejoice in what we are called to be in Christ and what we have received in Christ, the salvation of our souls, no matter when we have responded, and when we do respond, just like my parishioners husband we too will find ourselves transformed and renewed in ways that are obvious to all who see us.