

# *Sheer Grace of God!*

## TRINITY 15 – A 2017 – SPRINGLINE PARISH

[John 3. 10-4.11, Philipians 1. 21-30, Matthew 20.1-16]

OLD TESTAMENT (1<sup>st</sup> Reading: JONAH 3. 10-4.11)

The context of the reading from is the short story (history? myth? satire?) of the reluctant prophet disappointed by success. The prophet cannot believe that God does forgive everyone who repents.

The story is that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, then sent to preach in godless Nineveh. His resentment at being there at all turned to dismay when he found that God does actually forgive people who repent. Jesus truly gives a good description of God's love for us. Jesus will tell his own parable of the God who does not give what we deserve but an equal measure of sheer grace to us all.

We are like Jonah. We complain as if God did something wrong. We want God to be like us.

The key verse, however, is 4.2: *"I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing."*

Also the verse 4.11 shows God's heart and master-plan for the world. It reminds us of Jesus' words in John 10.10: *"I came that they may have life and have it in abundance."* Also in another gospel we hear Jesus saying: *"I came not for the healthy but for the poor."*

EPISTLE (2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: PHIL. 1.20-24, 27):

In the second reading we find St Paul in sombre mood. The context of the letter is that of the first Christians in Europe. It is a letter of great warmth written from his prison in Rome. Although in prison as we see in verse 13, Paul says that life after death will be better than this life.

The first Church Paul founded in Europe was at Philippi. Some years later, from prison, probably in Rome, he writes warmly to his friends. Despite his circumstances, and sometimes longing for his life to end, he believes he can still be useful to God. Let the readers, then, keep faith against all their adversaries.

Perhaps there is even a trace of self-pity in this passage, with his insistence that he would be happy to die. Perhaps, on the other hand, Paul intends to shock his listeners. He tells them that life is dear – but his faith is dearer. Would we be prepared to give up our life rather than renounce Christ? We should also be struck by the strength of Paul’s faith. The power of death may be great but the power of Christ’s love is greater. Those who are in Christ will be taken through death into the fullness of life and the joy of Christ’s loving presence in eternity.

The key verses in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading are verses 21 and 27:

*“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

*“Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”*

THE GOSPEL: (MT. 20-1-6).

Eternity is there in the gospel too. Probably this is a parable that Jesus told on the way to Jerusalem. The theme that comes across is that of God’s generosity. There are no differential wages in the kingdom. This well-known parable of the generous land-owner helps us understand how God gives not what we might earn from him, but more than we could ever desire or deserve. In the kingdom of heaven there are no rewards, only grace for all.

The vineyard is an image often used in the Old Testament to describe the ancient People of God. The parable tells us that even the latecomers who join the vineyard team are rewarded. The message is that not only Jews can hope for salvation, but also the many people who have come to hear the message of God’s love through Christ. God is reaching out to them too. This is Christ’s message – that ***God is generous***. Many more people are being added to the chosen people. Lifetime saints and last-minute Christians are all welcomed by God. There is also a radical equality in this parable.

There is a message for us individually also, and it links to the first reading with its reminder that we should seek God while we can. The message is that it is never too late to repent, never too late to turn to God, never too late to begin again, never too late to make an act of trust in the love and mercy of God.

We are all equal in the sight of God who gives us each the same reward: his love, his mercy, and abundant life. It is time we accepted God’s sheer grace.

The key verse is 15:

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

Rom 11.33-36: *“O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counsellor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

Exodus 3. 4: *“I am who I am.”*

1 John 4.7,16: *“God is love.”*

God sees the heart.

## CONCLUSION

**The Word of God reminds us that it is worth to put God back at the centre of our lives.**

The problem with the world today and with our nation is the problem of lack of faith in God. Economic problems, social problems all have their source in a godlessness in our society. When the society is based only on profit, on success, on pleasure, on prestige and not on God's Kingdom of love, justice and truth, we will never be happy and we will never reach real solutions.

Our governments do not any more give God his sovereign place and authority. Until we return to God as a nation, as a society, as a family, as individuals, we will never solve our problems on a long term basis!

[ST Mattapally]