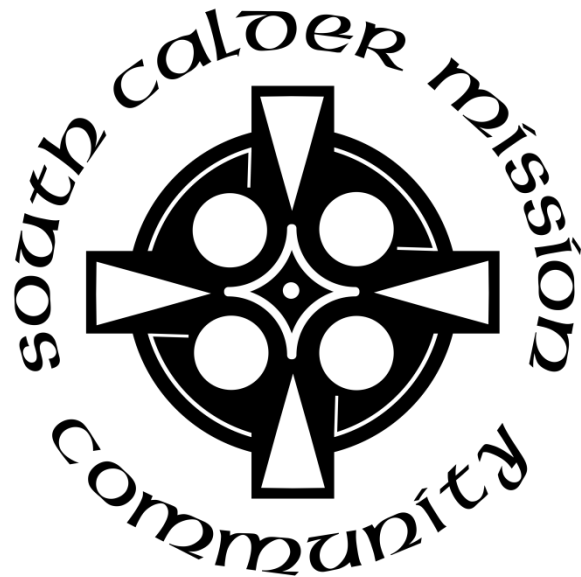


*into his courts
with praise...*



A Service of the Word
for
Sunday 20 September 2026
Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.

A Service of the Word for Sunday morning

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INTRODUCTION

*“ The Lord is gracious and merciful, ♦
long-suffering and of great goodness.”*

Psalm 145:8.



THE CONFESSION

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our
sins in penitence and faith.

**Almighty God,
I confess that I have sinned against you
in thought, word and deed;
I have not loved you with all my heart;
I have not loved my neighbours as myself.
Have mercy upon me,
cleanse me from my sins,
and help me to overcome my faults,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Receive God's forgiveness

May the Father forgive us
By the death of His Son
And strengthen us
To live in the power of the Spirit
All our days. **Amen.**

PRAISE

O Lord, open my lips...
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
Give me the joy of your saving help...
and sustain me with your life-giving Spirit.

THE COLLECT

Lord of creation, whose glory is around and within us:
open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with reverence
and know your peace at our lives' end, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Suggested hymn to sing or read ***When morning gilds the skies.***

THE WORD OF GOD.

Exodus 16: 2-15.

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of

the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.'

Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining." ' And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God." '

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

Psalms 145:1-8.

I will exalt you, O God my King, ♦
and bless your name for ever and ever.
Every day will I bless you ♦
and praise your name for ever and ever.
Great is the Lord and highly to be praised; ♦
his greatness is beyond all searching out.
One generation shall praise your works to another ♦
and declare your mighty acts.
They shall speak of the majesty of your glory, ♦
and I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
They shall speak of the might of your marvellous acts, ♦
and I will also tell of your greatness.
They shall pour forth the story of your abundant kindness ♦
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and merciful, ♦
long-suffering and of great goodness.

Philippians 1:21-end.

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Suggested hymn to sing or read I lift my eyes to the quiet hills.

GOSPEL

Matthew 20:1-16.

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.

Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

REFLECTION – What are you complaining about?.

Every so often I receive an e-mail from some vineyard owners in Minervois in the south of France, and by chance one came last week. They are in the middle of harvesting Syrah grapes, working flat out to complete the harvest in changeable weather. Curiously, this message gives an interesting background to today's gospel reading. Both our Old Testament and gospel readings reveal the human tendency to complain, and contrast this with the generosity of God. But first, a couple of technical points:

1. in the Exodus 16 reading, the Israelites find strange flaky stuff on the ground, and Moses tells them it is food from God. The Israelites are asking, 'What is it?' and the Hebrew word they use is 'Manna?' So when we talk about manna as food, all it means is, 'What is it, what is this?'

2. At the end of the Matthew reading we have a little saying: 'Those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last.' Now this does definitely seem to be a saying used by Jesus, and it crops up in three other places in the gospels, in entirely different contexts, and was therefore probably not attached to this parable when Jesus first said it. In fact, it is only relevant here because the men who were hired last had to be paid first, otherwise the others would not know what they had been paid. If the first to be hired had also been paid first, receiving their promised silver coin, they would have gone home without knowing what the later ones were paid.

Now, as I said at the beginning both these readings contain an element of grumbling, of complaining. The Israelites led by Moses had seen the miraculous escape from Egypt, followed by the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, yet they were still not really trusting God to care and provide for them.

The reading is rather repetitive, but that is just Jewish story-telling technique, to emphasise the point: complaining against Moses is really complaining against God, and by now they ought to know better. But God will act to show he **does** care, he **is** in charge, and he does it abundantly, sending as much food as they could possibly want: his giving is generous, plentiful.

A similar combination of human complaining and God's generosity is to be found in the parable in Matthew chapter 20. One silver coin was the standard pay for one day's manual labour, and was considered to be what was required to keep a family for a day. So when the owner went early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard, both he and they accepted that this was the standard rate for a day's work. So far so good. But as in my opening example from the Minervois, the grape harvest is something that must be done at just the right time, before the grapes are past their best, or the weather changes. So the owner goes out at intervals during the day to find more workers, and the last batch he hires only work for about one hour. Now comes the twist: because they each **need** one coin to live on, he pays them **all** one silver coin, regardless of how long they have worked – and unsurprisingly, the ones who have worked all day start to complain. So, remembering that this is a parable, we are to deduce that God is generous to his people, and gives us what we need rather than what we deserve.

When I began writing this, I discussed it with my daughter Mary, and I am grateful to her for some of what follows. We decided that we could see at least three interpretations of this parable: one in the context of Jesus' own ministry, one in the life of the early Church, and one which applied to our own time.

In the first, remember that Jesus was often criticised by the Pharisees for associating with tax collectors and other undesirables, and for saying that these too were loved by God, and able to repent and enter the Kingdom. So the Pharisees, who have laboured long and hard to keep the Jewish Law, are like the vineyard workers who worked all day; they resent these late-comers having a place in the Kingdom.

Moving on to the early Church, at the time in which the books of the New Testament were being written, we can see a similar scenario, where Jewish Christians represent the ones who have laboured through the heat of the day, while Gentile converts arrive just in time to share in the benefits of salvation.

Thirdly, and sadly, we do sometimes get a situation in the Church today, when someone newly converted, or even just a Christian who has moved into the village, comes along to church, to find themselves resented by those who have worked for years to keep the church going – especially if that new person takes on some job.

'Who does she think she is – she's only been here five minutes, and she's already offering to be.....' whatever it is. Of course, **we** wouldn't do anything like that in our churches, would we? We'd be glad of whatever help we could get – but I have known it happen, and in more than one place too.

So there we have it: a generous and forgiving God, and human beings all too ready to grumble and complain. We do rather live in a complaining society these days, and things that we might hesitate to say face to face can easily be posted on social media (but I'm not going to have a rant about that). What I do want to say is that although I choose not to post things on social media, I have realised that I spend quite a lot of time complaining inside my own head, having imaginary arguments with other people – often other drivers who have just done something stupid; or compiling letters of complaint which will never get written. One can waste a lot of time and use up a load of emotional energy, which would be better spent doing something positive.

It is possible to see much kindness and generosity in our local communities, and it is good to be able to acknowledge and appreciate this, rather than finding things to complain about. And remembering today's parable, let us also acknowledge and appreciate the generosity of God the Father, in loving us, accepting us, providing for us, however little we might deserve it.

Jonathan Falkner.

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **Fight the good fight.***

THE CREED

All I believe in God the Father,
whose loving care is the pattern for family life.
I believe in Jesus, the Son of God,
who lives in my heart through faith,
and fills me with his love.
I believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens me with power from on high.
I believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE PRAYERS

A time of quiet prayer for

- *The universal Church - Bishops, synods and all leaders church*
- *The leaders of the nations*
- *The natural world and the resources of the earth*

Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of Peace.

**Look upon our divided world
to be with those who are victims of violence.**

**We pray for the people of Ukraine
and all who have been subjected to the cruelty of others.**

Help us to know the gift of your peace

in the power of your Spirit and

we ask you to soften the hearts

of those who can stop the fighting.

**Creator God, we ask for your aid as your children of light
living in the darkness of our world.**

Amen.

Cumbria Ecumenical Spirituality Group.



Finishing with the South Calder Mission Community prayer...

**Heavenly Father we thank you for the life of your Church
in this place, and in all the villages of the South Calder
Mission Community;**

**for all who have served and worshipped you in years gone by,
for all who make up your family in our churches today,
for the faith we have in common, and for the people and
traditions which make each church unique.**

**By your Spirit, guide and equip us,
that together we might find new ways
to reach out to our local community,
to show your love to our neighbours,
and to encourage them
to follow the Lord Jesus in their lives.**

**Father, we offer ourselves to your service,
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,
And in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

and the Lord's prayer...

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

THE CONCLUSION

Suggested hymn to sing or read **Forth in thy name O lord I go.**

The following prayer is said

**Be with me, Lord, as I finish my prayer today.
May my lips always speak the truth;
may my eyes which have read your word
see only what is good;
and may my life as well as my worship
be always pleasing in your sight,
for the glory of your name. Amen.**

And now may the Lord who brought us to birth by his Spirit,
strengthen us for the Christian life.
May the Lord who provides for all our needs
sustain us day by day.
May the Lord whose steadfast love is constant as a mother's care,
send us out to live and work for others.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with us and remain with us always.
Amen.

So now may I go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Links for the hymns

When morning gilds the skies.

<https://youtu.be/pCsC0CUH34I>

I lift my eyes to the quiet hills.

<https://youtu.be/N8QSwakKNwA>

Fight the good fight.

<https://youtu.be/YppcFC8mxKM>

Forth in thy name O lord I go.

<https://youtu.be/AUVAbXgJyqQ>