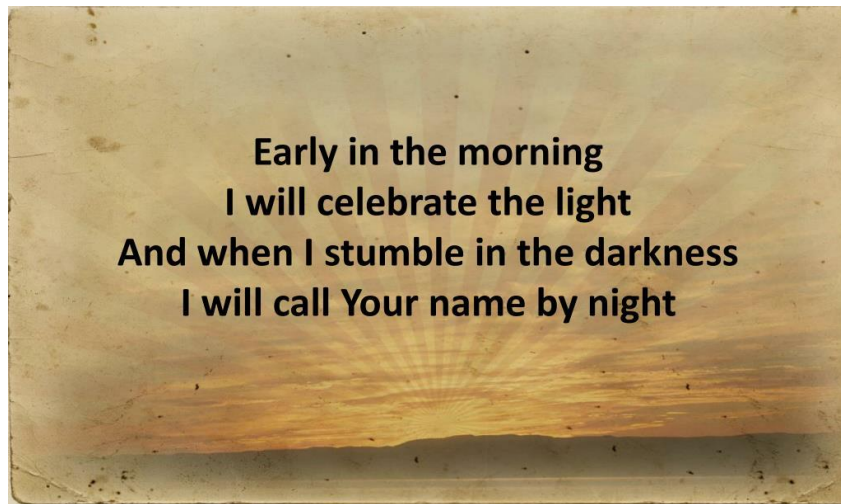


Learning to wait... learning to find



Prayer through the days, and through the day of life. From the song 'God of Wonders' by Paul Baloche.

I wonder whether you noticed the *timings* in our story today? The landowner goes out

Early in the morning

Then at 9am

Then at noon,

Then at 3pm

Then at 5pm

And then he meets the workers at the end of the day.

Sound familiar? They are the traditional times of prayer. People often think regular set prayer times are a Jewish or Islamic religious habit, but it is actually very much part of our Christian heritage. This is my prayer-book. It has the seven daily prayer services in it... set times, ancient times, throughout the day. People still pray that way now, in our faith.

So... what is Jesus saying. He's saying... whenever you rock up... whatever time in the day – or in the day that is our lives – God rocks up too. God is there, waiting. He's saying no matter what goes on in your day / in your life, if you've drifted off, or feel rejected, or couldn't get motivated.... God is going to keep on rocking up. You can never miss the boat with him.

Jesus is saying, 'keep turning your heart to God'. Because God's is turned to you. He says to us, *no matter what time it is, or what the story is... I want you with me.*

Sometimes life bruises and rejects us so much, we don't think this offer is for us – we've missed the moment, or we wouldn't be wanted or haven't been invited ... or so many different reasons that knot up our hearts, and get in our way ...

But all we need to do is simply rock up and wait... because when we do, something about just doing that – means that we will find. For he is waiting too.

"Why are you standing here, idle?" asks Jesus in surprise throughout the day ... what are you waiting for ... Just go on up there, and muck in – I just want your company as we work together ... the *only* thing that is keeping you away from me

..... is you.

We have this inner sense we sort of have to earn God's love and it's simply not true. And it can lead us very astray into thinking of God's love as some sort of transaction. And that can lead us into mistaking sharing in God's love for drudgery, and turn joy to weariness, and service to resentment. We can take ourselves, and life far too seriously. And love far too lightly.

In today's parable, we have a group of people getting all worked up about how hard they have tried for Jesus. How much work they have done, how much reward they have earnt, whether they've done or earnt more than each other. "It's not fair!", they cry...

... and I think I can feel Jesus, standing in the middle of all this, laughing.... Replying "it's not fair? well... alleluia to that!"...

Jesus' love is not a transaction. We don't earn it, and we don't deserve it... we simply encounter it, and are given it, free, for grace.

If we fragile humans got what we truly deserved.... Well, I don't know about you, but I'm not the greatest worker in God's kingdom. The 'things I have done that I should not have done, and the things I have left undone that I should have done' ... what I deserve doesn't make a pretty picture. Thank God that he is not fair.

In fact, often, it's when we finally realise we have very little to bring, that we are most open to receiving him – and letting him lift us up into who we are meant to be. Often, it's when we let go of what we can earn for ourselves, and just let ourselves receive him, that we find ourselves with the most fruitful harvest. (his)

The reward in this story is the same for everyone – because the reward is love. And love cannot be earnt. It just... is. Like the penitent thief on the cross, the instant you open your heart to Jesus, you find yourself in the fullness of paradise.

And in a strange way, paradise is simply what it is to have Jesus in your heart. It changes your view, and your understanding, both of yourself and of those around you, as you learn to see human worth simply through our shared human fragility and grace. And in this way anyone who truly hangs out with Jesus for the joy of it, will be so drawn into his love, that they will learn to be overjoyed if people come to join in.. even if they are late to the harvest.

Let me tell you a secret There is nothing you can do to make God love you more. There is nothing you can do to make God love you less. God's love....is not something we must earn, although it is something we can refuse to accept.

And it's just there. Waiting for you. Coming to meet you, every time you open your heart. Early in the morning, through the day, and even at the close of it. Waiting for us when we need it the most, and often when we – or the world – feels we least deserve it.

Hoping at every moment that we will come and wait for him. This is why the old prayer traditions are such a blessing. They remind us, no matter

how we are feeling, to open ourselves and our day and our story to God. Even if we don't know how or why, to just come... into the marketplace... open your heart to the possibility he might come.

Because He Will

Love is not fair.

He's just... there.

Every moment, every day. No matter what.

Thank you, God

Sometimes we experience this in our lives, and it is such a gift to be able to share such times to encourage others - and so, to lead us into our prayers, which we will share before our creed today... Jamie is going to offer us a testimony reflection.

Jamie's reflection

I used to think relying on God meant being strong enough to handle everything myself. I'm beginning to realise that sometimes relying on God means admitting that I can't

And that's quite a difficult thing for me to admit. I've always wanted to be the person who could keep going. The person who could sort things out. The person who could carry the weight and keep moving. But recently, I've found myself in a place where I simply can't do that on my own. And perhaps that's where faith becomes real.

Not when everything is going well. Not when we've got all the answers. But when we can say, "Lord, I can't do this by myself. I need you"

I found myself waiting and waiting, then I reminded myself

Abraham waited 35 years

Joseph waited 13 years

Moses waited 40 years

And Jesus himself waited 30 years in the quiet before his public ministry began.

So I'm pretty sure I'm in good company.

We, myself included, trust God, we trust him just like David, like Joseph, like Moses and Joshua, like John the Baptist and like Peter and like Paul did.

In times of struggle we're reminded we're not alone. We have a God who loves us dearly, and trusts us. He has his hand out for us – all we need to do is reach. We can't see him, but be assured he is there. So we trust him and take that leap. (and maybe that's where the saying 'leap of faith' comes from?)

I'd like to finish with part of Psalm 121

"I lift my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from?"

My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth"

Amen