

Radical Love

Placing to one side whatever you think about the outcome of the Scottish referendum, one of the issues which was often raised in the campaign was that of social justice. Both sides were arguing for the establishment of a more socially just society in which the socially and materially less well-off were to be given the opportunity to live in a country which considered their needs and their hopes as fundamentally important to the proper government of their country. Whether this social renewal will come about as a result of the outcome of the referendum of course remains to be seen. It is however interesting to note that the gospel this weekend offers some insight into the generosity of God, and it simply highlights the shock we feel when we experience it, since our own attempts at generosity and through such generosity social justice, can sometimes fall woefully short.

Of course it is fair to say that Jesus probably didn't have the notion of the Scottish referendum in his mind when he told this parable and nor did he teach it in order to establish the rights of employees in the workplace. Nevertheless the imagery it generates of hired workers in the vineyard does have a strange allusion to today's fruit and veg pickers etc, but that isn't what the parable is about. As we have said more than once about the parables, Jesus is teaching his listeners to open their eyes and their ears, as he urges them to apply the message to their own situations. The kingdom of God is breaking forth and with it comes something which is going to change everything, so that what we have taken as right and proper in the past, must now be challenged and thereafter made new. The currency by which this change is to be effected is the love and generosity of God for his people, and it is the radical application of this love and generosity that so astounds us.

In our dealings with each other we have our rules and our parameters according to which we look to establish boundaries to give us a sense of what is good and proper. More often than not, we are reluctant to breach them without good cause. Consequently what we consider as "generosity" is often commensurate with a value, for example how much we esteem a person or how much we love them. Perhaps unwittingly this tends to influence our capacity in the generosity stakes. Jesus is telling us that with God generosity and love can never be contained by such barriers. Every person, regardless of their circumstances, is loved equally and precious, and the outpouring of this love and generosity it is not dependent upon anything that we do. Being loved by God is all encompassing and all fulfilling. It isn't measured out in quotas dependant on how much you earn. It is total and gifted to each person, no matter what.

The problem we have is coming to terms with such a radical concept. We can understand it in terms of those we love, and it is a fact that we are more than happy to be generous with them. Our difficulty comes when we are asked to be similarly generous to those we don't love or with those we see as different from us and we then begin to ask questions. The point which Jesus is making in the parable demands that seeing this difference teaches us something about ourselves, and about our relationship with God; that his thoughts and his ways are far different than ours. The parable teaches us that we have to train our minds to such thoughts and concepts since when we do, even if it is at the eleventh hour, we will still receive the fullness of his radical love and generosity made flesh in Jesus Christ, his grace and his truth.

