

Reflection: Matthew 20.1-16

Christopher Smart was an Englishman born in 1722, a poet with a mixed reputation and a troubled personal life. "*The Parables of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Done into Familiar Verse*" was published in 1768.

Smart ends *Parable Ten*, '*The Lord of the Vineyard and the Labourers*'; with these lines:

*According to the Lord's intent
By this same penny here is meant,
The crown of him that wins the race;
The time of day's the time of grace.*

*Some from their infancy begin
To cleave to Christ, and flee from sin,
As Samuel walk'd to God well known
As soon as he could walk alone.*

*Some must be strengthen'd ere they thrive
In Christ, and ev'n their prime survive.*

*Some are religious not before
Their knees are weak, and heads are hoar.*

*And others on a sick-bed lie,
And there first call on Christ, and die.*

*God's property is mercy still,
And he can grant it when he will.*

*He knows man's talent, and his pow'r.
Some lab'ers earn more in an hour
Than others in a tedious space,
And frustrate love and thwarted grace*

*Thro' Christ the final doom may stave,
And rise fructif'rous from the grave.*

Smart's own troubled life and the ebb and flow of faith throughout it, have clearly shaped his understanding of the parable. We might want to re-work some of his approach, but he does leave us with some penetrating reflections.

He wants us to see that everyone has the opportunity to respond to God's call – and that in God's eyes we are all equally valued, whether we respond early in life (like Samuel), in midlife (our 'prime'), when older ('heads are hoar' like frost), or on our 'sick bed'.

'The time of day's the time of grace' – *today* is the day that God calls to us, whatever day it is. Respond we must, if we are to rise with Christ and be fruitful, both in our life here and now, and in the life to come.

Perhaps you feel much of your life to have been '*a tedious space*' or your experience to have been marked by '*frustrate love and thwarted grace*' – Jesus tells us in this parable that, through God's mercy and kindness, it is never too late to redeem the past. Have *you* yet responded to God's call with your own clear '*yes Lord!*' of commitment? Today is the day of God's grace.

'O Lord my God, I believe in you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit... enable me to remember you, to understand you, and to love you. Amen.' (St Augustine)

Adrian