Generous Ways

**THE FIRST READING**

**God’s hidden plans**

In the sixth century BC Israel was invaded by the Babylonians. They destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and forced hundreds of Israelites to live in Babylon. About fifty years later King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and released those held in captivity. The Exile seemed to destroy God’s chosen people, but Isaiah and others perceived this event as part of God’s plan to save his people from their sinfulness (vv.8-9).

**Rebuild!**

Verse 6 is better translated: “Seek the LORD where he may be found…” For Jews, the holiest place on earth was their temple, the one place God dwelled, so to speak. The prophet declares that the time has come to rebuild the temple so that the Israelites can again know the fullness of God’s presence (v.6). The LORD has forgiven his people for the sins that led to the Exile. Once the temple is rebuilt, everyone who turns away from sin will be allowed to enter it (v.7).

**ISAIAH 55:6-9**

**Reading closely**

1. How should people seek the LORD?
2. What sort of ways and thoughts must people abandon?
3. Why should people turn away from sin right now?
4. How might this passage have challenged the people who first heard it?
5. How might people have reacted to these words?
6. Do you think people thought of God as merciful and generous in forgiving?

**Living the word**

7. What differences have you noticed between your ways and God’s ways?
8. How does this passage challenge you?
9. How does it reassure you?

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways...
This parable, unique to Matthew, is similar to the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The landowner is like the father who loves both his sons, even when the older brother gets angry at his father for forgiving the younger one.

An independent saying
The parable is bracketed with a saying that doesn’t quite apply (19:30; 20:16). The moment of reversal is a minor part of the story. Moreover, the saying indicates that people who don’t seem worthy of God’s kingdom will enter it before those who seem worthy, whereas the parable indicates that everyone can be part of God’s kingdom no matter when they show up.

Undeserving
One way to interpret the parable is through the lens of Jesus’ association with sinners. The sinners are the workers employed later in the day. The Pharisees and other good Jews are those hired first. Pious Jews may resent the inclusion of sinners in God’s kingdom, but God welcomes both.

The parable is also a warning to those who expect a reward for their piety or good works. Right before this passage Peter asks what the disciples will receive for having given up everything (19:27). The parable suggests that the rewards of following Jesus are so great that they exceed what anyone could deserve. No one earns a place in God’s glorious reign. Despite all we do, life with God is a gift.