

Lectionary readings: Ezekiel 18: 1-4, 25-32; Psalm 25: 1-9; Philippians 2: 1-13; Matthew 21: 23-32

For reflection and prayer

- **Ezekiel 18:** We are each responsible for our own choices and actions before God. God wants us to make choices in line with how He has shown us. We need a new heart and a new spirit, the desire and the will to change our ways, to be transformed through the Spirit of God working within us. But the crucial question is: do we want to be changed? We have all heard people say - and perhaps we have said it ourselves - 'This is how I am.' But we are not a closed system; we are living beings. And so long as we are alive, there is the possibility of change. So this week let's review where we are, how we are and how we need to change. And let's turn to God and ask for grace to become the people God wants us to be, not hiding behind excuses.
- **Psalm 25:** There are many people filled with shame and tortured with guilt because of something they have done in the past. They can't forgive themselves and they don't believe that God can or will forgive them. But the Psalmist reminds us that God is a God of unfailing love and compassion and full of mercy. I love v10 in The Living Bible: '*And when we obey Him (live as God wants us to), every path He guides us on is fragrant with His loving-kindness and His truth.*' Every path - happy or sad, exciting or humdrum, painfree or painful - fragrant with God's presence. Is this your experience?
- **Philippians 2:** Paul assumes that Christ makes a difference to our lives, that the church is a community

of the Spirit, that the faith affects our hearts, not just our minds. So Paul says, if that is the case, we will live in harmony with one another; we will love one another; we will be deep friends with one another; we will humbly be willing to stay in the background; we will encourage one another; we won't be obsessed with ourselves. In other words, we will become more and more like Jesus, who emptied Himself, saying no to the ego, living a selfless life, a life completely given over to God. This is a huge challenge to us who most of the time live to boost our own ego, acting out of self-interest rather than out of selflessness. It might be good to reflect this week on when the ego is coming to the fore and on how we can live differently.

- **Matthew 21:** Which son do you relate to or resemble in the parable? The one who said, 'I don't want to be like Jesus, to live as He tells me to. It's too hard.' But then somehow you are deeply moved by Jesus and drawn to follow Him. Or the son who says, 'Sure, I'll follow You. I'll do all You want me to, and be all You want me to be.' But these remain only words, like singing the words of the hymns, saying amen to the prayers, giving mental assent to the Bible readings each week, but failing to live out our discipleship every day? Jesus commended the tax-collectors and prostitutes for their willingness to be changed, over and above the religious people who refused to respond to Him, thinking they had no need to be changed. That must have shocked the religious people of His day. Does it shock us?

A prayer

Lord, may I *'be swept up in worship with the saints, which surges in wonder, gratitude and obedience, and shapes my life into an irrepressible YES to You, to all my sisters and brothers, and to the presence of the Kingdom among us.'* (Ted Loder)