

Septuagesima
St. Matthew 20:1-16
February 17th, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Whatever Is Right You Will Receive

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

When the Lord God Almighty created the heavens and the Earth, He placed man and woman into the Garden of Eden to cultivate and work the garden. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden when they sinned by eating from the tree from which they were forbidden to eat—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, the New Adam—our Lord + Jesus Christ—came down from Heaven and was incarnate into our flesh so that He might plant a new garden. He planted the garden of the holy catholic and apostolic Church, in which we, who are called by the Lord, live and work every day of our lives.

The holy Church has been planted for us to labor in. But our labor is not the labor of doing good works, or the labor of winning salvation by our lack of sins. No, the labor which we do in the garden of the holy Church is the labor of receiving God's gifts of grace and faith. Our labor is to hear His Word, and receive His blessed Sacraments, so that by the work of the Holy Ghost we might receive faith, and be strengthened in our faith. Thereby, through this faith gifted to us by the Holy Ghost, we are able to cling to our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ, and His work of atonement for us and for all men. This is the labor which we do in the garden of the holy catholic and apostolic Church: We hear the Lord's Word and participate in His Sacraments, and receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

We become workers in this garden because the Lord God has called us from being idle in the marketplace to be workers in the vineyard. To be called by the Lord—to be invited to work in the garden—is the theme of the day.

We have entered into the time in the Church's year which is called Pre-Lent, or Gesimatide. These three Sundays prepare us for the penitential season of Lent. In essence, the entire Lenten season is broken down into three sections (much like most of the Church's year is divided into threes). This first division is Gesimatide, which we have just entered upon. The second division is Lent proper, from Invocavit, the first Sunday in Lent, to Laetare, the fourth Sunday in Lent. The last division is Passiontide from Judica to Holy Saturday, and Passiontide is divided up into three sections, too: the beginning of Passiontide from Judica to Palmarum, Holy Week, and finally the Tri Duum, the last three days of Lent from Maundy Thursday through Holy Saturday.

This time of Pre-Lent is also divided into three sections. Each of these three Sundays is its own division. Each Sunday has a specific theme observed. This developed on account of the practice of the Early Church when the bishop would begin to invite those who had not been baptized to enter into catechesis which lead to their being baptized during the Easter Vigil service late on the Saturday before the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. This process of making new Christians through Holy Baptism first involved the call, or invitation of the bishop, second, it required catechesis, or instruction, in the doctrines of the Christian Church, and finally, it involved consecration, or enlightenment, through the waters of Holy Baptism. So then, each of these three Sunday in Lent embrace a particular part of that process in the Early Church: call, catechesis and consecration. Or, invitation, instruction, and enlightenment.

Today, our Lord God calls us away from being idle in the marketplace, to work in the vineyard of the Church. The marketplace is the place outside of the Church. The ones in the marketplace being idle are the ones who do not have faith, cannot produce any good works and do all sorts of abominable acts of evil, and for this reason they remain without a reward. They remain outside of the grace of God, and remain unable to receive the reward of Heaven. When the day is over, they are cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Thanks be to God that He has called us out of the marketplace of the world into His holy vineyard of the Church. Here we are called to labor in the vineyard. Our estate before being called into the Church is portrayed beautifully in the Introit for the day. *"The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me. The snares of death confronted me."* Outside of the Christian Church, there is no salvation—there is no reward, no wages to receive—only death and Hell. When we see our sin, and our disobedience to the Commandments of the Lord God, we feel the weight of death and Hell. We are like the Psalmist in the Introit, we feel Sheol surround us, and death confronting us. We feel sorrow and distress for we realize there is nothing but punishment for what we have thought, said and done.

It is then that by the grace of God, we hear the voice of the Householder, Who calls us to look away from our sins, and calls us to labor and remain in His vineyard of the Church. He calls us to look upon the labors of His Son, our Lord + Jesus Christ, Who fulfilled the Law perfectly for us; He fulfilled the Law of God, the Commandments perfectly for us, since we are unable. And He calls us to look to the tree of the holy cross, where our Lord and Savior offered up His life as a ransom in our place. He took our punishment upon Himself, so that we might receive the reward for which He labored with His suffering and death. The Vine of the Lord + Jesus was placed upon the vine pole of the cross, so that His Blood might be poured out for our forgiveness, life and salvation.

We receive and drink His Blood under the wine, and receive and eat His Body under the bread for the forgiveness of our sins. He becomes a refuge for us who are troubled and oppressed on account of our manifold transgressions. Out of the depths of our soul we cry for salvation, and He hears our cries and mercifully delivers us from our sins, by giving us His very own Body and Blood in bread and wine. We come before this altar, the place where our Lord + Jesus is present, humbly kneel in our hearts, and receive the reward which He desires to give us. This is the labor which we are called to do in the Church, to receive His gifts, and be comforted by His works when our sinfulness threatens to consume us.

However, we find from the parable of our Lord + Jesus Christ today, as recorded by the Evangelist St. Matthew, that there are two types of laborers. A warning is placed before us today. There are those in the vineyard who think their labor is better than the labor of others. They have borne the heat and burden of the day. They are better Christians because they do more and better good works than other Christians. Their work in the vineyard is centered on only receiving the denarius that they were promised.

The second type of laborer is the laborer who works not expecting a specific type of reward. They have only been promised to receive *“whatever is right.”* These laborers labor under grace. They are just happy to no longer be standing idle in the marketplace. They are happy to no longer be surrounded by Sheol and confronted with death. They understand that they are justly punished for their iniquities. But they labor knowing that the Householder is just and fair and will mercifully reward them.

Therefore, this parable is in no way about doing good works to earn your salvation. We do not labor expecting a better reward than other people. We labor, that is, hear God’s Word and receive His blessed Sacraments; we participate in the means of grace, not to prove how good of a Christian we are; to show that we are better people than those who have not labored as long and hard as we have—who have not borne the burden and heat of the day by doing good and better works than our fellow Christian.

No, we labor, that is, we hear God’s Word and receive the means of grace, so that we might no longer have to return to the marketplace; that we might no longer have to be in sorrow as Sheol encompasses us or be trapped in sin when death confronts us. We hear through God’s Word that the Lord + Jesus has our reward, and He gives it to us freely on account of grace. We receive that reward through the faith that was gifted to us by the Holy Ghost. Our Lord + Jesus has heard our cries that we make from the depths of our souls, and delivers us into the blessed vineyard of His holy Church, and there He gives us the reward of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

Adam and Eve were placed into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it, but they only cultivated sin and death. We, their children, have only cultivated sin and death by our every thought, word and action. But the Lord + Jesus has called us out of sin and death, into faith and life with Him in His vineyard of the Church. And just as the bishops of old called people to receive the good gifts of the Lord found in Holy Baptism. The ministers of the Lord are calling you all into the vineyard to receive His good gifts which we have through our own Holy Baptism.

You have been baptized into the holy catholic and apostolic Church. You have been given faith by the Holy Ghost through the means of grace. You have been rescued from the marketplace of the world. You have been called to labor in the Lord’s vineyard. From this labor—this hearing and receiving God’s Word daily in your lives—you will receive the reward that is right for you: the crown of eternal life. Come and receive the reward of the Lord, for He has labored for it unto death, for you. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!