

Septuagesima
St. Matthew 20:1-16
February 9th, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Many Are Called

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, Who through Thy holy Word hast called us into Thy Vineyard: Send, we beseech Thee, Thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, that we may labor faithfully in Thy Vineyard, shun sin and all offense, obediently keep Thy Word and do Thy will, and put our whole and only trust in Thy grace, which Thou hast bestowed upon us so plenteously through Thy Son Jesus Christ, that we may obtain eternal salvation through Him, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

Today the Church begins a new season; the season of Pre-Lent or Gesimatide. Pre-Lent is the first of three parts to the penitential season known as Lententide—Pre-Lent, Lent proper, and then Passiontide. During Pre-Lent the Church focuses on the inviting, instructing, and enlightening of the believer in Christ; with one of those themes being emphasized each week. In Lent the Church focuses on her sin and the consequences of sin. Finally, in Passiontide, as the Church enters Holy Week and approaches Good Friday she focuses on the Passion, that is, the suffering, crucifixion, and death of her Lord and Savior, the Lord + Jesus Christ.

Several changes to the Church's Liturgy have taken place in order to emphasize that she has moved into a penitential season: the song of praise—the Hallelujah—commonly sung before the Gospel is no longer heard until the Easter Vigil; the Gloria in Excelsis also is no longer heard until the Easter Vigil; violet vestments and paraments are now used throughout Lententide (with the exception of Festival days). These penitential changes will increase as we enter into the next two parts of Lententide: During Lent, all music, except to support congregational singing, will be silenced; and flowers will no longer decorate the altar. In Passiontide, all images of Christ and all crosses will be covered with violet monk's cloth.

All of this is done to lead us to the cross of our Lord + Jesus Christ, and to His glorious resurrection on the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. So after being called into the Church by the Landowner—who is Christ—and being catechized by the Word of God, and by that Word having our eyes opened to what our Lord + Jesus has done for us, we reflect upon our sin and the lost condition in which we find ourselves, so that contrition over our sins might take root in our hearts, and we might repent of our sinfulness, and desire to live lives more pleasing to our Lord and His will. For after we have learned of our sinfulness, we see the penalty for that sin in the crucifixion of our Lord. In that cross our Lord suffers and dies for our sinfulness; willingly taking on our punishment, so that He might die in our place, and that we might live as new creations—without sin in His heavenly kingdom.

It is into this heavenly kingdom, in which the Landowner—the Lord + Jesus Christ—calls us today. Septuagesima, which means “seventy to the beginning”—meaning we are within the seventieth days from Easter—marks out the time until the resurrection of our Lord. It is clear from the Gospel for today, and the Propers for the day, that our focus for today is on our lost condition on account of our sin. This is exactly the condition of the workers, who were in the marketplace. They were lost! They were just standing around idle with no purpose, with no meaning, with no work. The Lord—the Landowner—calls them out of their idleness. He of course does this by His Word, which invites us to come into this holy house; believe on our Savior; and receive His good gifts of forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

We were called out of our idleness at our Holy Baptism. At that washing of regeneration our Lord placed His holy Name upon us; He claimed us as His own—He claimed us as His worker in the vineyard. Which leads us to the question of what is the work of the Christian in the Lord’s vineyard? First, we need to explore what this work is *not*. And this is shown us by the people who were called first. Everything for them is centered in the Law. We “*have borne the burden and the heat of the day.*” Notice their focus is on what *they* have done, and not on the Landowner’s generosity of giving them a job in the first place. These workers represent the works righteous people—the people concerned with earning their salvation by what they do, and who they are. This parable shows us that our salvation is not dependent upon our works; it is not because of what we do, or who we are (or who we are *not*), or even what we do *not* do. Our salvation is dependent upon what our Lord—the Landowner—graciously gives us.

In this parable, the wage received was a denarius—this was the equivalent of a day’s wage during our Lord + Jesus’ time. The day in this parable represents the entire life of a believer, and the denarius is the eternal reward of Heaven and our Lord’s grace bestowed upon all those who labor in the Vineyard, that is, those who believe that our Lord + Jesus Christ is the one, true, Savior, and who hunger and thirst after righteousness, by coming to this holy house to worship with other workers (that is, Christians) until the day when the workers are called out of the Vineyard to rest from their labors and receive their eternal wages.

The workers who were called last receive the same wages as those who were called first. But notice that only the wages of the first ones called are established—it is agreed together between the first workers and the Landowner. The word in the original Greek language used for this agreement is “symphony,” that is, there was a “harmony of voices.” No one thought, at the time of agreement, that they were receiving anything unfair, they were all in one accord. The workers would receive what they believed to be a fair wage, and the Landowner would have His vineyard worked. However, this agreement; this symphony; this “harmony of voices” does not exist with the workers called at the other times of the day. The only agreement they made was to receive what the *Landowner* deemed was fair for them to receive.

To put it another way, they did not care what they received, they were just happy to no longer be standing idle in the marketplace. “Yay, we get to work in the vineyard!” Can you see the difference between the workers called first, and the workers called last? There is a group that is concerned only about the work they do, and the wages they deserve for it, and a group who is just happy receiving whatever the Landowner graciously gives to them.

It should not be hard for us to decipher which workers are to serve as an example to us. Our Lord has called us into His Vineyard, that is, His holy Christian Church to work, through the virtue of our Holy Baptism. What is our work, according to the parable? To gladly receive the wages, that is, the rewards, for being in the Vineyard; to rejoice that we get to work in the Vineyard—we get to worship our Lord + Jesus with our fellow believers when we come into this holy house. We perform the work of

hearing and learning God's Word, receiving His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation, coming to the holy altar to receive His true Body and Blood in bread and wine.

This is the reward that we receive today on Septuagesima, the beginning of Pre-Lent. We who were lost, standing idle in the marketplace with no hope of reward, no eternal life, no forgiveness for our sins, and no salvation, have been graciously called out of unbelief into the Church. We are no longer lost in the condition of our sinfulness. "Out of the depths" we have cried unto our Lord for mercy, and He heard our cry. He forgave us of our sins, and made us new creations. Therefore, rejoice and be glad for you are a called child of the Triune Lord God, enjoying the fruits of the Vineyard, and you will receive your eternal reward on the Last Day when you are finally called out of the Vineyard into your eternal home Heaven. May the Lord Almighty grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, heavenly Father, Who in the last hour of time hast called us into Thy Vineyard, and of Thy grace given us our unearned penny in all manner of temporal and spiritual goods: grant, we beseech Thee, that, trusting only in Thy mercy, we may at all times in patience and humility render unto Thee cheerful and patient service and never murmur against Thy goodness, to the end that we may not be denied by Thee and rejected, but continue in Thy household, and glorify and praise Thy marvelous grace; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!