

Septuagesima  
St. Matthew 20:1-16  
January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021  
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC  
Augusta, GA  
All Saints Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC  
Myrtle Beach, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## Call the Laborers

*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.

The Landowner from the parable recorded in the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew's Gospel went out early in the morning to call laborers into His Vineyard. He agreed with the laborers that He would pay them all a denarius—a day's wage—for the work that they would do in the Vineyard. The Landowner, needing more laborers, also goes out throughout the day calling more laborers into His Vineyard; at the third, sixth, and ninth hours. They agree to go into the Vineyard and work, but no mention is made of an agreement of what the Landowner would pay. They were only content to be at work, they had faith that the Landowner would pay them a fair wage.

The Landowner goes out one more time towards the end of the day—the eleventh hour—and finds laborers standing idle in the marketplace. With only one hour left in the day these laborers also agree to go into the Vineyard and work; gladly receiving as wages whatever the Landowner deems is right.

When the day was spent, the Landowner told the steward to “call the laborers.” The last called were to be paid first ending with those who had labored all day, bearing the burden and the heat of the day. What is the wage that those who were hired last, but paid first receive? They each received a denarius. They were paid for a full day's work, even though they had only worked one hour. The same is true of all those who were hired at the third, sixth and ninth hours. They all received a denarius—a full days wage, even though they had only worked for three, six, or nine hours of the day, and not the full twelve. Remember that no agreement was made with these laborers about what their pay would be, so the Landowner in His abundance gives them all the same wage.

There was, however, an agreement made with those who were called into the Vineyard in the early morning. These laborers had bore the burden and heat of the day. They worked a full shift; a full

twelve hours from sun up to sun down. They had agreed with the Landowner for a denarius as a wage. That they agreed with this wage is evident in the word that we translate as “agreed.” The Greek word is “symphony,” literally “to sound together.” You all have heard of a symphony. It is a musical term. It is when different instruments play together, each adding their distinctive tones, to form sweet and pleasant music; many different instruments sounding together in one accord. What this means for the parable is that Landowner and the laborers called very early in the morning sounded together in agreement on the wage. There was no dispute about the wage. Nobody thought the wage was unfair when they agreed upon the denarius. But at the end of the day, upon seeing their fellow laborers receive the same wage that they had agreed upon, they become jealous and demand more.

The accusation against the Landowner is a common one among us poor, miserable sinners: the wage is unfair. In fact, the accusation is not really aimed at the wage, but at the Landowner. The Landowner is unfair. The Landowner, as you may already know, is the Lord God. How often do we see this accusation leveled against the Lord God? The Lord God is unfair cries the sinner. We so do not want to see our fellowman receive more than we do. In our sinfulness, we grumble and complain when it appears someone may have a better life than we do; a better job, a better family, better and more stuff and the like. We begrudge our neighbor his possessions, and covet them for ourselves.

We certainly compare ourselves to our neighbors based upon their earthly possessions, and get jealous about our lack of stuff compared to our neighbors, but this parable is getting at something even more corrupt. Our Lord + Jesus, the One Who is telling the parable, is directing this parable at the scribes and Pharisees; at those who think their righteousness far outshines those of the sinners and tax collectors. In their corruption, they do not want to see any of the Lord God’s gifts go to the sinners and tax collectors. That the Lord + Jesus would just hand out forgiveness to anyone who comes to Him in contrition and faith is appalling to the scribes and Pharisees.

It is easy to bash the scribes and Pharisees of the holy Scriptures, but we have this tendency in us as well. We can be tempted to think that we are holier than other people; that our righteousness far outshines the righteousness of those who we deem unfit in Christian matters. If you have ever said to yourself, “at least I am not like that person” this parable may apply to you. Are you really any different from the laborers who were called early in the morning, who think they deserve more wages because they had borne the burden and heat of the day?

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was better in their minds because they were sons of Abraham, and had dedicated their life to the study of the Scriptures. They had lived holy lives all their life. And yet, the reward was the same for both them and the sinners and tax collectors: forgiveness of sins. It can be nothing but sin and evil that would deny someone else forgiveness, because the person does not believe that that person deserves it. In the parable, it is not the laborers that determine the wages, but the Landowner. He desires to give to the last man the same as the first. He desires to forgive the sins of all those who labor in the Vineyard. He desires to reward us all with eternal life and salvation.

This is really upon what our focus should rest. We should not be looking at our fellowman; not at his earthly possessions, nor upon how great of a Christian he appears to be, or does not appear to be. We should not be looking at ourselves and our fellowman—at the laborers in the Vineyard. We should rather focus on the Landowner and His generosity. This is the main point of the parable: The Landowner’s grace, mercy, and generosity. We can complain about how unfair the Lord God is, just like so many in this world do today. But, when we complain about how unfair He is, we should really be talking about how gracious He is to us, even though we do not deserve it.

He is totally unfair to us! We deserve His eternal wrath and displeasure; we deserve to remain outside of the Vineyard—the Church—but this is not how He treats us. If He was fair to us—treating us

the way our sins deserve—we would only receive death and Hell. But He is unfair to us. He does not condemn us on account of our sin and shame, but instead condemns Himself to die upon the tree of the holy cross. He takes upon Himself our flesh—humbling Himself to be born of Virgin—so that He can create the Vineyard, and give us a place in which to labor until He calls all of us laborers to receive our eternal wage. He has created the Church by obeying the Law perfectly and suffering and dying in our place and rising again on the third day. He then sends to us His Holy Ghost to create and sustain faith and life in us, so that we can see just how unfair He is to us.

He is so unfair to us that He rewards us from His gracious bounty with wages we do not deserve. He gives us freely out of His generosity the forgiveness of our sins, a life in Heaven with Him, and He graciously rescues us from sin, death and the devil. We do not deserve these things on account of our manifold transgressions, but He give them all to us by grace.

He is abundant in His gifts. He gives us a washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Ghost in the waters of Holy Baptism, in which we can daily drown the Old Adam and rise as new creations every single day. He gives us to eat of His Body and drink of His Blood in bread and wine, that we might receive the gifts that He won for us on the tree of the holy cross where He offered His Body and shed His Blood for the atonement of the whole world, so that all those who believe on Him might have everlasting life. He even preaches into our ears His holy Gospel, the good news that He is totally unfair to us. He rewards us with forgiveness, life and salvation, even though we do not deserve it. He gives this all to us because He is gracious and compassionate toward us. He desires to give to us last persons, just as He gives to those who are certainly more deserving.

In faith, we can receive the wages from our gracious Lord and Savior with thanksgiving. We have been called to labor in the Vineyard—the Church—for the wages that the Landowner—our Lord God—deems right. The wages that He deems is right for us is the wage that we do not deserve. He gifts us with forgiveness, life and salvation. Let us give Him thanks and praise eternally for all that He has done, for He has called us from standing idle in the marketplace of the world, to labor in the Vineyard of His Church, where we receive the reward of our labor: the forgiveness of our sins. Thanks be to our totally unfair Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ! 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!*