

Septuagesima
St. Matthew 20:1-16
February 5th, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, 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.

Sermon Text:

And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, "Call the laborers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first." And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a shilling. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a shilling. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, "These last have spent *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he answered and said to one of them, "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

Prayer in Pulpit before 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.

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

Our Lord + Jesus Christ tells us today that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a Householder, Who is the Christ, going into the marketplace of the world, to call laborers, all those who have faith in the Lord + Jesus, to come and work in His Vineyard, the Church. That the Church is compared to a vineyard is appropriate, for it turns our focus to the fruit that is produced by a vineyard. What fruit comes from a vine? The fruit of grapes. And what do we make with grapes? We make wine. And what do we use wine for in the Church? We use it in the Lord's Supper, along with the bread, so that the Lord + Jesus might give us His Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine for the remission of our sins. Our Lord + Jesus calls us into His Church so that we might receive the shilling of the remission of all our sins.

Several things are valuable to us in this parable that our Lord + Jesus tells in this Gospel recorded by the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew. First, is the constancy that our Lord shows by continuing to go out into the world to call sinners to repentance; to call them into the labor of the vineyard. He begins very early in the morning. Since the fall of man into sin, He has been calling us into the vineyard. And He keeps going out at the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day to call men into

repentance; to call them to faith. He has gone out into the world throughout the history of the world to invite people into the Church. Throughout the all the Old Testament times, He has invited them through the preaching of the prophets.

In the same way He continues to invite all of us who would hear His call and go into the labor of the vineyard is this eleventh hour of time; in these last days. The days after He has come in our flesh, and redeemed us by His perfect fulfilling of the Law, and by His suffering and death on the tree of the holy cross. Just like He called the people of the Old Testament times to the work of the vineyard through the preaching of the prophets, who pointed to His coming in the future, He now uses His bishops, pastors, and deacons to preach the Gospel that He has indeed come, redeemed us with His precious Blood, and innocent suffering and death.

He invites us into His Church to receive His gifts; the wages with which He had agreed with us. This is the second thing that is valuable to us in this parable: the wages of the laborers. Note well that the Householder only agrees to a particular wage with the first group; those He had called into the labor of the vineyard in the very early hours of the day. He agreed to them for a shilling. In the Greek language, this wage is a denarius. It was the equivalent of a day's wage. The laborers who were called very early in the morning knew the wage. They agreed with the Householder on the wage. In the Greek this agreement literally means they "voiced together." The Greek word is where we get our English word, "symphony." A symphony is a collection of voices that when joined together make sweet harmonious sounds. Therefore, the laborers, very early in the morning, did not find the wage unfair.

The Jews were the first people that our Lord called into the Church. He gave them His Law through Moses, and made them His people, and gave them the Promised Land of Israel, where they would be able to worship Him as their Lord God, and He could be their Lord God by giving to them the remission of sins through the sacrifices performed, first in the tabernacle, and then in the temple. But these things were only a shadow of things to come. For the Lord + Jesus Himself would come as one of us; the Lord God would come to be one of His people, and He would end up being the true Temple, the one made without hands. He is the true Temple in which the true sacrifice of redemption for His people is to be found.

Against this Christ, the Jews murmured. He was not the Messiah they were looking for. He was too generous with the forgiveness of sins. He was offering forgiveness to "sinners." They expected a greater wage than they had received for being faithful, in their own minds, to the tenets of the Law. It was not right that the bread of the children should be cast from the table to the little dogs. These last were indeed sinners, just as we are poor, miserable sinners, but they were also sorry for their sins. They wished to amend their sinful lives. They clung in faith to the mercy and grace of the Householder, Who promised to give them whatsoever was right for their labor.

That same temptation is present for us. There are many who view their good works, or their status in the Church, as the reason for the Lord's grace. They like to claim that they are deserving of greater rewards, better pay, richer entitlements. Surely they are deserving of it for they have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. They and their families have been members of the church for generations. They are both active in the church, and hold positions of authority. But our Lord + Jesus does not reward us laborers the way the world rewards its laborers. The world would gladly see the "unfairness" shown to these first laborers and would reward them in kind. But the Lord + Jesus does not reward as the world rewards. For He rewards us with a gift far greater than power and status.

He rewards us poor, miserable sinners with the remission of our sins. For those of us who are aware of how much a miserable sinner we are, there can be no grumbling or murmuring for having received such a reward, for we understand that we deserve so much *less* than what we have been given. We are not deserving of more and greater rewards, we are deserving of less than what the

Householder has given to us. As we confess in the explanation of the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "We are worthy of none of the things for which we pray." We receive all of our wages purely out of our Lord's grace and mercy. He wishes to be generous with His gifts.

This is why He called us all into the Vineyard of the Church in the first place. He desired to be gracious and merciful to us, and give us the wage of a shilling we do not deserve. Therefore, He continues to go out into the marketplace of the world through the preaching of the pure Gospel of the Word of God to call laborers into His Vineyard. He continues to call us into His Vineyard of the Church by continuing to offer us the remission of all of our sins. He gives to us that which He feels is right, but of which we are undeserving. He gives us this undeserved gift, because of His great love for us, and for all the world.

This love is shown us in His sacrifice on the tree of the holy cross for us. He offers up His Body and sheds His Blood; He suffers and dies as a ransom for us, so that He might redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The connection to our Lord's Passion is made by the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew in the section after today's pericope. For St. Matthew tells us that the Lord + Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem; He was on His way to offer up His life as a ransom for us, so that we might have the remission and forgiveness of all our sins and iniquities.

And so that we might be confident that this sacrifice is for us He gives us a meal in this Vineyard of the Church. He feeds us with His own Body in the bread, and He gives us to drink of His Blood in the wine. By this meal we receive the remission of all our sins; we receive the shilling He so lovingly and graciously wants us to have. For when we were sitting idle in the marketplace of world, living in our open and manifest sinfulness, He called us to be in His Church. He called us to obey His Law, and be His people, even as He did when He first made the Jews His people through Moses. He now calls us laborers through His ministers of the Word, who preach into our ears that even though we are unworthy of the wages that we receive from our labor in the Vineyard, we have a gracious and merciful Lord, who being good, wishes to give to us last, as He gives to the first.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us not murmur about the wage we receive, for we deserve so much less than we have received. Rather, let us rejoice that we have been called out the world—the marketplace that would only leave us starved and hungry—into the Church. For here in this Vineyard, our Householder—the Lord + Jesus—gives us abundantly of the rewards of *His* labor on the tree of the holy cross. He gives us the remission of all our sins. Thanks be to God! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the 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!