

Septuagesima
St. Matthew 20:1-16
January 28th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Sent Them into His Vineyard

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“And when he had agreed with the laborers for a shilling a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

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.

My dear friends, we come today to the beginning of Gesimatide, also called by some, “Pre-Lent.” This short season, two and a half weeks, prepares us for the penitential season of Lent. Indeed, this season in which we currently find ourselves has some of those marks of the Lenten season, the omission of the “Hallelujahs,” the use of the color of violet, and the omission of the “Gloria in Excelsis.” But this season also retains some aspects of the non-penitential seasons: we retain the use of the Preludes and Postludes, and we continue to use flowers on the altar. This season bridges the gap between Epiphany and Lent. It prepares us for Lent by gently leading us away from the festival nature of Epiphany to the penitential nature of Lent.

In this short season we have three Sundays. These Sundays present us with a call, some catechesis, and conversion. We are invited to work in the Vineyard. We are instructed in the Word of God by the spreading of the seed of the Word of God. And we are enlightened with the healing of our Lord + Jesus, as He opens our blind eyes to see with the eyes of faith that the Lord + Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. Today, we are invited and called into the Vineyard of the Church. What does this call and invitation mean for us? Our Lord + Jesus tells us a parable today that shows us what working in the Vineyard means for us. For just as the householder sent workers into his vineyard to work, our Lord + Jesus has sent us into the Vineyard of the Church to work. But what is the work that He would have us do? Has He not done all that is necessary for our salvation?

The lesson our Lord + Jesus would have us learn from this parable is that He is gracious and loving. He is generous with His gifts. For at the end of the parable, at the end of the day of work, all received a shilling; all received the same wage, whether they worked twelve hours or only one. These ones who only worked a brief time show the love and graciousness of our Lord + Jesus. They reveal how generous He is with His things. They received the same wage as those who bore the heat and the

burden of the day. These are thankful for the gift that they receive. They had been standing idle in the marketplace all day. Why? Because no one had hired them. Along comes the householder, our Lord + Jesus, and invites them to work in His Vineyard. Without the invitation by the householder, they would not have had any wage given to them that day. They would have gone home hungry.

Not only do these last ones receive a job, but they receive a full day's wage. The householder is truly generous with His gifts. He gives to the last the same as to the first. This, however, does not sit well with the first ones that were called to work in the Vineyard. When they received the shilling, they murmured against the householder. In the parable our Lord tells us that they agreed to this amount of payment. The Greek word used here is our English word "symphony." There was a blending together of mutual agreement. They did not think the wage was unfair at the beginning of the day when they were called to work in the Vineyard. So, what changed? They are offput by the generosity of the householder.

In the two groups, the first group and the last group of workers, we see a picture of the Church. For the Church is made of both groups, those who thankfully receive the reward given to them, and those who feel they deserve more than everyone else. The last group has learned to accept the gifts of the Lord + Jesus as pure grace. They did not deserve the gift and they know it. They know that the rewards of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation are not something they could ever do enough work to merit. They receive these gifts as pure grace of the Lord God. They thankfully receive these gifts, knowing that they did not merit them by their works. They receive them only because the householder—the Lord + Jesus—is a gracious and giving Lord and Savior.

The first group, however, is very different. These are the ones who continue to believe that they must do some work. Even if they do not vocalize this belief, their actions speak louder than their words, for they are ever focused on their works. One can identify these first workers because like the ones in the parable they believe they deserve more at the end of the day. They bore the burden of the day and the scorching heat; surely, they deserve more than the shilling; surely, they deserve more. But one must remember that they too were standing in the marketplace at the beginning of the day. They also would not have gone home hungry and poor had the householder not agreed to pay them to work in his vineyard. The generosity of the householder is already shown in that he went early in the morning to hire workers to work in his vineyard. The generosity of the householder is shown even more throughout the parable because he continues to go into the marketplace to hire workers. He went the third hour, and the sixth, and the ninth hours, and finally at the eleventh hour. He went to hire workers five times. This is how much the householder desired to be generous with his things.

This is lost, however, on the ones who were called at the beginning of the day. The generosity and grace of the Lord + Jesus is lost on those who continue to trust in their good works. When we point to our works and believe that we deserve more than we are receiving we are no different. We have forgotten that we are all saved by grace through faith. Every good thing we have from the Lord is by grace—by pure gift of the Lord God. We could not and cannot atone for our own sins. Our Lord + Jesus had to suffer and die on the tree of the cross to atone for our sins and win forgiveness for us. He had to open up the way to eternal life by His resurrection from the dead. He had to defeat sin, death, and Satan because we are constantly defeated by them daily. We did nothing to merit or earn our salvation, but our loving and gracious Savior gives us these gifts to us freely. We receive them whenever we participate in the means of grace.

Yes, we should do good works, as the Law demands, but we should never put our trust in them. We should never think that we deserve something more when we have been "good Christians." This is why our Lord + Jesus adds the last line of the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew, "So the last shall be first, and the first last." Both parts of this phrase are directed at us—at all those who hear these words and believe them. For if we think that we have done more than the next

person when it comes to works, and we believe we should receive more wages, like the first workers in the parable, our Lord tells us that the first will be last. This is a warning to us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. These words are meant to attack our pride and hubris. They are meant to humble us once again that we who think we are first, are really the last. We do not deserve that which the Lord God would give us. We deserve nothing but the Lord God's eternal wrath and displeasure. So, when we are filled with pride we should remember and hear, "The first shall be last."

But the good news is that when we are on the other end of the spectrum, when we believe that our sins are so great that no one, not even the Lord God, could love us on account of them, our Lord + Jesus once again shows us how generous He is toward us. For He tells us, "The last will be first." Just as the last laborers called to work in the Vineyard each received a shilling, that is, they each received a wage which they did not earn or deserve, our Lord + Jesus opens our ears to hear the Gospel that He has done all that is necessary for our salvation. He has won for us forgiveness, life, and salvation. He has defeated sin, death, and the devil. He has opened up the Kingdom of Heaven for us. We do not deserve it. We have not worked enough for it. Our sins only deserve His wrath and displeasure. But while we are yet sinners, our Lord offers up His life as a ransom for our life and gives us the full reward of His labor to us.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us humble ourselves and give thanks that our Lord and Savior has invited us into the Vineyard of the Church, so that He might instruct us with this teaching about His generous grace and mercy, and also enlighten us with saving faith which trusts in His works and merits alone. For we who are last in the eyes of the world, and in our own minds on account of the guilt of our sins, have been made first in the eyes of our Lord God, and in the Kingdom of Heaven. For we have gracious and generous Lord God, Who offers His Only-Begotten Son up as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. By our Lord's suffering and death, we have been made first in the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, by His grace He has sent us into His Vineyard, so that we might receive from Him the undeserved shilling of forgiveness, life, and salvation. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the 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!