

## St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church

Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz

October 12, 2014

Matthew 20:1-16

18th Sunday after Pentecost (series A.)



20 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' 5 So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. 6 About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 7 "'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' 8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' 9 "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' 13 "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' 16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Helpless! That's what we are on account of sin – we are spiritually helpless! Imagine for a moment you are coming out of the subway of a big city. You are taking the last escalator to the sunshine of the ground level. Your feet are moving up and up. The handrail you are holding firmly – is going up and up. The side wall of course – is stationary – solid. A young lady in a hurry – is racing up the steps beside you – in a hurry – when she pushed against you – get out of my way! Get out of my way. In a moment – you lose your balance. In a moment you are falling head first – on your back – helplessly falling *down* the *up* escalator. People all around you are yelling and shouting – and grabbing at you! Helpless! That's what you are! Only Jesus can send his angels to pick you up and set you safely on your feet again. This is surely a small miracle – compared to washing away all your sins – so that we can spend forever safe in Heaven. This simple sweet Gospel is good news ours by grace through faith alone! Today as we consider yet another of Jesus' parables we will:

### Learn Law and Gospel Picking Grapes

1. God loves his workers all the same.
2. God's order isn't our order.

As we join the Rabbi from Nazareth today – Jesus’ public ministry is just about over. Those who are stubbornly resisting the Gospel are becoming more and more frustrated with Jesus! We are reading from Matthew Chapter 20. Chapter 21 is Jesus’ triumphant ride into Jerusalem – riding down the Mount of Olives on a little donkey – the children crying out his praises. When the elders told Jesus to tell the little children to shush – to be quiet – Jesus said – if the little children didn’t sing out – the very stones would cry out his praises!

Jesus’ teaching became even more intense if that’s possible – as the time was short – his tortured death on the  $\dagger$  was looming just ahead. Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God! Not a place – but the power of the Holy Spirit – in the  $\hearts$  and lives of God’s people! **20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.** This is common. People who are unskilled labor – gather early in the morning in the place where they know workers gather – hoping to be hired for the day. They have those one person coolers – red with a white handle that pushes to the side. They will do what they are told to do – all day long – in order to get a day’s pay at the end of the day. They can be found in California – picking strawberries; picking melons; picking apples. They can be found along the Rhine River – on the steep hillsides picking white grapes for Rhine wine. They can be found in West Chicago – working at the George J. Ball Seed Company – putting a leaf from a mum plant into the smallest hole punched into sterilized potting soil in huge trays – that will be misted and warmed through the coldest winter day – to grow into mum plants to be sold literally around the world. Nimble fingers do the same motion – precisely – quickly – again and again and again – a thousand times in an hour. It makes your back ache and your fingers and hands and wrists ache just to watch them.

**3 “About nine in the morning he (the owner of the vineyard) went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ 5 So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. 6 About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ 7 “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’”** There is more work than workers. The owner goes back to the place for hiring again and again. 9 in the morning, noon, 3 in the afternoon and finally the last hour – 5 o’clock to find still more workers. Why have you been here all day long? Not because they were slackers – but because no one hired us! Come – work for me – starting 5 o’clock – and I will pay you a denarius. **8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ 9 “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.”** It is part of human nature to think we ought to get what we deserve – what we earn. It is part of human nature to think life ought to be fair. We watch *Youtube* videos where rude drivers have flat tires – run into light poles – skid on wet pavement – and we say, “Good! They got what they deserved! Serves them right! I like that!” We do. So when grape pickers who worked only one hour – get a day’s pay – we think I will surely get more – because I worked harder. I worked longer. I did more. I earned more and I will get more! **Each one of them also received a denarius!**

So they complained. **11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’**

**13 “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’** In the Seminary we are taught *hermeneutics*.


Hermeneutics are sound principles of Bible interpretation and Bible understanding. Back in the day – in Martin Luther’s day-- there were countless levels of interpretation. There were clever and inventive people who took every “thing” – every part and piece of a parable was made to represent some *one* or some *thing!* And that didn’t work out. There were all kinds of ideas that came from so many points of comparison. Good Biblical hermeneutics teaches you look for the *tertium* – the point of the triangle. What is the point? Not what are the zillion points – but what is the point? What is Jesus teaching us about the Kingdom of God? The point here cannot contradict the clear teaching of God’s Word anywhere else. So the denarius – what is the denarius in the Kingdom of God? At first blush you might think – that’s the point. Think about it. If the denarius is salvation – eternal life – then the people who complain are bothered by the fact that people who come to faith like the thief on the cross – right at the end of their life – get the same Heaven as the lifelong believer? Is that the point? I don’t think so. The point needs to be – the attitude of the owner – who loves His people. **God so loved the world!** God doesn’t love lifetime believers more than the thief on the cross. He loves us all! His attitude is one of grace – undeserved love! **God is love!** That’s not his *best* aspect. It’s his essence. **God is love!** And he loves all his people!

In the verses just before chapter 20 – the verses just before the ones we are concentrating on – Simon Peter said, **“We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”** And Jesus says what he will say at the end of this parable. Jesus said before and after, **“Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first!”** Our ♥ needs to be like God’s ♥! **13 “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend.** *Friend!* This is the Greek equivalent to our idiom – friend/buddy/pal! Friend can mean exactly that – you are my friend. It is also the same word used in, **“Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?”** And still more ominous – to Judas Iscariot Jesus said, **“Friend, do what you came for!”** It is not for the worker to grumble and gripe against the owner. It is not for us to question or grumble or complain against our Savior! **14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?** Envious because Jesus is generous? That can’t be right – and so? See again God’s amazing grace. We don’t earn anything from Jesus. We don’t deserve anything from Jesus. Jesus is kind and good and gracious and generous. Forgiveness is ours by grace through faith. Faith is a gift of God – worked by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace – the Gospel in Scripture and the Sacraments! All glory belongs to Jesus and Him alone!

**16 “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”** We will in a world that loves to put people in pigeon holes! Have you been on an air plane lately? “We will now begin boarding with 1<sup>st</sup> class passengers!” There is business class. There is the gold club, the silver club, the platinum club. People in the tail of the plane – rows this number to that number. Even through security – they can print a little strip on your boarding pass – and you do not have to take off your shoes – don’t have to take off your belt – just step through the metal detector and pick up your carry on. This world pays attention to the rich and famous – people with gifts and abilities step to the head of the line. Gifted people are exactly that – people who have received a gift from God – a talent – a blessing – to be used faithfully for the glory of God – and the benefit of their neighbor. **“So the last will be first, and the first will be last!”** If you go to a big city –

chances are you will find beggars. You don't see that too much in Watertown. Beggars – literally on their knees – prostrate on the cold hard cobblestone sidewalks – with their greasy worn baseball cap just past their head – a few coins inside. Beggars – literally on their knees – prostrate with their puppy prostrate beside them. Or one beggar – on his knees – but looking at you – with the saddest eyes in the world – looking like any moment now – tears are about to run down his filthy face. Or look on the park benches – and you see homeless people – literally filthy all over. Their hair a greasy knotted mess. Their clothes covered with grease stains and food stains and worse. Their pants torn here and there – holes all the way through. Their shoes missing laces – not nearly the right size scuffed and scraped – holes through their socks. We are spiritually homeless street people – beggars – who are saved by grace alone! It doesn't matter if we were baptized on the 8<sup>th</sup> day – with lapel pins of perfect Sunday School attendance – with diplomas from Lutheran Grade School, Lutheran High School, Lutheran College – with an advanced decree – ushering every week since you were confirmed – singing in the adult choir – baking cake from scratch for Jesus – bringing fruit salad – to every dinner – staying to do the dishes. We don't earn grace. We don't deserve grace. We are saved because of the kindness and goodness of Jesus our Savior and Redeemer. Jesus loves you and Jesus forgives you! You can't hear that too often! Amen!

**To God alone all glory!**



Rev. Anthony E. Schuttz