



Pastor's Gwen Message

Sunday September 20, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

By now all our members should have received a mailing from Christ the Servant with Patty Tarras' letter, a pledge card and a letter from me. It is stewardship time once again. So, for several weeks I have been mulling over what stewardship means to me as well as how to deal with money. Well, our Gospel lesson from Matthew of the Laborers in the Vineyard could not have come at a better time.

This story demonstrates God's unusual attitude toward money. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who hires day laborers to work in his fields. Some of the workers are hired early in the day. They agree to work all day for as Matthew tells us, "the usual daily wage". The fair wage was probably a denarius, a small silver Roman coin roughly equal in value to the Greek drachma. If we put that in today's standards, it would equal about \$100. The landowner makes four additional trips to the marketplace to hire available workers. The last workers are hired around dinnertime, 5 pm.

Long day of work for the men who started early in the day. Short day of work for those hired at dinnertime. But it seems that the landowner is more interested in the need of the laborers rather than the urgency of his harvest. So, he tells all workers that they will be given what is right. This landowner

appears not to be concerned about hiring the best most motivated workers, but rather that all the workers get hired.

And we all know what happens. Our landowner pays the men, all the workers, even those who were hired at 5pm the same amount. They each get a denarius for their efforts, whether they were in the field for 12 hours or just one hour. How wonderful it was that this landowner has, out of his generosity, given a full day's wage to all the workers, so they could provide for their families. But oh, no. . . . The workers who worked all day were quite upset that they did not get more. They were paid what had been agreed upon but were outraged that they did not get more since the landowner paid the part time workers the same amount. And they complain, imagine that! They are angry that they did not get more since they had worked more. The men who worked only one hour, got paid the same. How unfair is that?

Well, Jesus did not tell this story as a lesson of proper labor relations. It was told centuries before governments established wage and hour laws and before there could be lawsuits over equal pay for equal work. Jesus told this story to make a point about God's grace, God's extreme generosity. We have a generous God who gives everyone the same amount of money. It seems that God does not accept our contemporary attitude that certain people deserve more than others. He does not even accept our attitude that the poor deserve no more than they are getting because after all, they only worked one hour in the day. Our society assumes that those of us who work long, hard hours deserve our money. Those of us who invest wisely deserve greater rewards. And the reverse would just simply be unfair.

In our world today money is the way we often assign value to our lives. Just as society has taught us that there is a pecking order, when we assign titles to ourselves, president, doctor, pastor, senior associate, partner, deacon all fit somewhere in the hierarchy of workers in our world. We want to be recognized for our degrees, our seniority and our years of service. There is a pecking order and we determine our value and our joy in life by knowing our place in it. Our world tells us this and that in order to move up from the cubical to the real office with a window, we need to strive to work hard for our bonuses, our country club memberships and fancy letterhead.

Unfortunately, too many people spend our lives constantly comparing our lives to our neighbors and even sometimes our friends. And folks when we let

the world place value on our lives, we will not find peace, but rather we will only have jealousy and envy for those who have more or do better than we do.

But in the Kingdom of God such ranking and hierarchy of people is irrelevant. Our Gospel lesson today, clearly tells us that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. That certainly sets the worldview upside down. God is not a very good capitalist. From Jesus the stories are clear of how His vineyard works. We are to share in the task of healing a torn and suffering humanity. In the Kingdom of God, every person is of equal value.

Jesus died on the cross for every person. He paid one price for all of us. God's love for each one of us is the same. What an awesome God.

Today our country is torn not only by COVID-19 but also by racial stress. It would do us well to realize that ALL LIVES MATTER to God. Black and white do not matter. It is what is in our hearts that count. Today as I re-read this story, I see Jesus calling us to realize that fact. We are all God's children no matter whether we are first or last.

But the real moral of the story is that the landowner took care of all the workers, just a God loves us all the same. We truly have a great God of abundance.

And what do you think Jesus' message is to us about money? Give that one some thought. I am not bold enough to tell you what God thinks but I assume it is quite different than what our world tells us. And perhaps God sees money as ministry. The landowner, God, gave money to all the workers so they could all go home and feed their families that day. And God does the same for us. God gives us all we need in life. Through Jesus God teaches us not to store up our riches. Through Jesus He teaches us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit those in prison. Through Jesus He teaches us that being generous follows His example.

At my home congregation, St Olaf, we never called the budget a budget. We used the term Ministry Plan. Money given to the church is a resource that can be turned into ministry. Yes, money is used to pay salaries and in our ministry plan I am a big part of where the dollars go. Money is also used to educate our youth as well as all our members. Money is used to fund local

charities. And the list goes on and on. Just reread your letter from me and see some more of the examples of what money is used for here at CTS.

We are entrusted with a pile of money as the church, here at CTS and the bigger the pile the more we can do with it. And our God teaches us to have attitudes of abundance. And I am pretty sure that most members of our congregation are not experiencing scarcity. We have an abundance of God's grace and we have an abundance of God's money.

So today I encourage you to give some thought to money and its meaning. Is it a way of keeping score. Is it a way of demonstrating that we are better than other? Is it the means to luxury and a life of pleasure? Does money give us peace and satisfaction? Or is it a measure of a generous character? Is money a measure of ministry?

I hope and pray that Christ the Servant Lutheran church will continue to be a place where people have generous hearts. If that is the case, we will not have trouble meeting our 2021 budget obligations. OPPS. . . our 2021 ministry plan. If we are a people that give as the Bible says, " with a cheerful heart", our church will have abundant opportunities for ministry to serve others.

God is good all the time. God loves us abundantly. So be a good landowner, be generous to a fault. Give back to God some of what He has entrusted to you and you will find your reward in heaven. **AMEN**