

**Septuagesima: February 9, 2020**

**“With What Is His”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is our Gospel lesson the Parable of the workers in the vineyard, especially these words, “**Matthew 20:15.**”

Who would dare to tell God that He is not allowed to do what He wants with what is His? Which of you is brave enough to begrudge the generosity of God? It is hard to readily admit; yet, it is something we all do quite often. This text is an important one, as we get ready to walk through Lent in a few weeks. Don't let Lent be about you. Jesus had just told the rich young man how to have eternal life by pointing out his lack of generosity and the works of the new life in faith. As the man leaves, Jesus tells His disciples, “*Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*”<sup>1</sup>

That is a hard text, especially in a rich country such as ours. Who can be saved? Jesus says, “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*”<sup>2</sup> Then Peter boldly and emotionally retorts what we all think, “*See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?*”<sup>3</sup> Jesus responds with our parable for today.

It can be easy to get lost in the many details when preaching this text. There are many trees upon which to focus that can make us miss the forest. Jesus plainly tells us the parable is about the kingdom of heaven. It belongs to One Master, who determines its value, its work, and its workers. You have the benefit of hearing this text already knowing what God does with what belongs to Him. He sent His Son to die for the sake of the vineyard. Through His very death, He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. One does not force their way, or put forth their stellar resume' to gain entrance to eternal lifetime opportunity; with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 19:23-24

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:26

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:27

Your fasting or giving something up for Lent can certainly be fine outward training, but they do not make you worthy of eternal life. It can be a good tool to remove some of the things that have crept into the way of reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the Word of God; but that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words—given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>4</sup>

The topic and theme of this day is a hallmark of the Reformation—Sola Gratia—grace alone. The vineyard teaches the importance of guarding the proper relationship of grace and works. The story is about work and illustrates the meaning of grace. Jesus' story about workers in a vineyard teaches what St. Paul taught, ***“To the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”***<sup>5</sup>

While all need to hear this parable, these words are especially directed at Christians, because it describes true Christians and false Christians. They all work in the vineyard. Jesus isn't talking about people who don't confess the Christian faith, don't go to church, and don't publicly identify themselves as Christians. He's talking about people who outwardly confess the Christian faith.

There are two kinds of professing Christians: true Christians and false Christians. The true Christians believe that Jesus is their Savior from sin, death, and hell. They believe what God promises them in Christ and through their faith; they receive what the promises promise. Since Jesus has already rescued them from the punishment of their sins, they know and believe that they are righteous before God. They don't have to win over God's heart. They already have His favor. They are saints. They are forgiven of all their sins. They are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. They do good deeds because God has already made them good by forgiving them all their sins.

False Christians can be very convincing. They may say that they believe in Jesus. They may speak with their lips the Apostles' Creed, pray the Lord's Prayer, kneel at the altar and eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus; but they are not

---

<sup>4</sup> Luther's Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar

<sup>5</sup> Romans 4:4-5

Christians. They hold to a false faith. They trust in their own good deeds. They believe that they earn God's grace by doing good. They twist God's Word to fit their own particular lifestyles, all the while holding onto hatred and spreading evil with falsity and lies toward His Word and His messengers. While they pay lip service to Jesus, calling Him Savior, they don't trust in His salvation. They believe they are always doing what is right, and no one can tell them otherwise. Many times when confronted with the Word of God, they resort to bullying tactics; sweeping as many as they can into their lies and hatred. False Christians don't care so much about what is right; but only that they are right. They are thereby insulting the suffering of Jesus, trampling on His blood, and despising the grace of God in Christ.

The false Christians are paid by the work they do. They receive the praise of the world. When they are done doing all the work they have done, the owner of the vineyard tells them: "Take what is yours and go your way. You have already received your reward." They never knew God. They knew only their own labor. They wanted others to see them and they want to be justified in their own works.

Sadly, those who trust in their own good deeds are scandalized by God's grace. They look at religion as a work, or a job. They judge religion the way people judge jobs. You put in so many hours and you get so much money per hour. You earn the money you receive. You worked for it. The false Christians apply the standards of the workplace to the kingdom of heaven.

Rather than a gracious God who can do what He wants with what is His, He is accused of being unfair. Humans are touted as knowing better than Him, "We've got it figured out, God has to get on-board." This comes out in thoughts such as, "Rather than God paying for sin with the death of His Son, you must earn it; whether by doing so many good things or giving so much money.—A man cannot baptize or speak forgiveness, I don't need it from pastor, only God can do that.—I don't need to be in church, I can get just as much Jesus outside of this building.—God is not limited to only the water, word, bread and wine, He is everywhere."

Instead of allowing God to be true in what He says in earning your forgiveness only in the death of His Son and distributing that forgiveness to you in the very specific means that He Himself has established, false Christians look for any and every way around it. They convince themselves that they know better, because they get disheartened by the grace of God, “We’ve been here all day. It’s not fair.”

The true Christians know that God doesn’t think like we think. His kingdom is a kingdom of grace. You work, not for pay, but for the joy of it. The false Christians, who worked for twelve long hours enduring the burden and heat of the day, settled up front what their payment would be. They were working for pay. Those who were hired later, whose work flew by without them breaking a sweat, didn’t ask for a specific wage, nor were they promised one. They wanted to work. In the words of the meaning to the Third Article, they are called and gathered, only then to be enlightened and sanctified. The true Christian simply trusts in God’s grace; they know, ***“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”***<sup>6</sup>

It’s not fair. When God has already justified you, He has reckoned to you the obedience and suffering of Christ. He makes you righteous. It is His work, not yours. Through His grace alone, God counts you righteous for Jesus’ sake. He regenerates your dead in sin hearts and bestows you with new life. In this new life, God the Holy Spirit works in you. In Him, you learn to love God. You learn to live in faith towards God and in love towards your neighbor. This is not a burden, it is simply the work that is done; it is a joy to the new life.

The life of the Christian is one that still has the sinful flesh. You are saint and sinner at the same time this side of the resurrection. It is for this reason we must still continue to preach the Law. The Law shows us our sins and teaches us that whatever we receive from God is not because we are such good people. The Law tells us that we are sinners – and we do well to keep that clearly in mind. God gives to us out of His grace. We don’t get what we deserve – nor should we want

---

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 11:27-30

to. We receive so much more and better than what we earn. We earn death and hell. We get life and salvation.

Part of this attitude has become a cultural phenomenon and causes many a Christian to twist the idea that our religion is about us. I touched on this last week a bit. We want it to be fun. We want it to be entertaining. We want it to make us feel good, and we want it to fit neatly into a sixty-minute package, but when we say those things, we are revealing that we think church is about US! It must fit my plans, my idea, me, me, me. Nevertheless, it is not about us, it is for us. It is about Jesus and His great love, and His great gift to us.

It is actually good for us to have our flesh disappointed in the worship service at times, as long as it is disappointed by the Word of God and the faithful worship of God, because then we are forced to place God and His will and His Word first, and humble ourselves before Him. When we grumble about this or that in the face of God's Word, we are like those laborers in the vineyard who grumbled because they just naturally thought that they were going to get more, somehow. We need to discipline our flesh to serve God and to hear His Word.

We do not need to leave the service feeling good. It would be nice, but it is not always possible, and to expect it is to have an unrealistic expectation. We are sinners. The Holy Spirit works when and where He wills and at times, you may feel guilty or ashamed; He works contrition and repentance to lead you to confession. He drives us to God's heavenly ordained and earthly given Means of Grace where He gives the forgiveness of sins to shattered, broken, poor, miserable sinners.

Some days the sin part overwhelms the joy part. In those times it is important to be vigilant in prayer and rest in a quiet joy in faith, knowing that Jesus died for you and took your punishment, guilt and death, even when we are not "feeling good" or bright and chipper. The gospel is true no matter how I feel today. The truth of God's Word does not depend on your feelings.

If we require a certain feeling, we have a "work" which we have imposed on others or ourselves before we can have salvation. If we demand that worship be

entertaining, or that it meet some other criterion than faithfulness to the Word of God, we have made it about us. The Gospel is for us, but it is not about us. Our salvation is God's gift to us, but it is about His love, and Christ's substitution for us, and about the grace of God, freely given to all who believe. It is about grace, not works.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, can God not do what He wants with what is His? Of course, He can. He sent His Son to die on your behalf. He has caused you to come together in this place. He has washed you in the blood of His Son giving you a new life of faith and love. He has caused His Word to be read and preached for your edification, your strength, your steadfastness. He has caused His holy absolution to be proclaimed to remove your sins from you as far as the East is from the West. He comes today with His body and His blood, generously outpouring His body and blood to drown your sins in the crimson flood of the chalice in His blood.

Let us pray:

“Oh, create a heart in me  
That in Thee, my God, believeth  
And o'er the iniquity  
Of my sins most truly grieveth.  
When dark hours of woe betide me,  
In the wounds of Jesus hide me.”<sup>7</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen

**Prayer of the Church**  
**Septuagesima: 9 February 2020**

---

<sup>7</sup> From Eternity, O God TLH 411:4

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. For the Holy Church, that all who have been called into the vineyard of the Lord would recognize their unworthiness for such a gracious gift, rejoice in the salvation they have in Christ, and remain steadfast in the Word, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all pastors in Christ, that they would gladly preach the saving Gospel to all, not counting the cost, and not for their own glory or the praise of men, but for Christ's glory alone; for all other church workers, that all they do would be in service to this same saving Gospel; and for an increase in these vocations, that the Lord of the harvest would use His laborers as His blessed instruments in bringing sinners into the vineyard of His redemption and love, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our congregation, that we would love one another as Christ has loved us, give generously to support the ministry here and abroad, pray for our enemies, put away all earthly grumbling, and bask in the gracious provisions our Lord lavishly bestows on us, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the nations of the world, that justice, peace and the common good of all would be the goal of all those in, and under, authority, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those are shut-in and for all those suffering or recovering from illness [*especially Larry, Zoey, Carmen, Susan, and those name in our hearts*]; for those who are sad and sorrowful; for those suffering from broken relationships or financial distress; for those to whom death draws near; and for those who are grieving, that Christ would be their health in sickness, their joy in sorrow and their life in death, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For Pastor Klinge, his wife Debbie, and the saints of St. John's, State Center, especially for the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments and for Your continued presence with Your people; that God would never leave or forsake His saints; that no one may be left without the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments.; that Christ's Church throughout the world may give faithful witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ both in word and deed; and that God would preserve and protect His people at all times, and bring them at last to the heavenly home which He has prepared for them, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Kistie, Carmen, Jakob, and June*. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who come to the table of our Lord this day, that they would receive the very body and blood of Jesus in repentance and faith, and to their abundant blessing, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the faithful who have gone before us and enjoy heavenly bliss, let us give thanks and praise. That we may be brought to share with them the feast of joy that never ends in the eternal vineyard of our Lord, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**