**9/24/23**

**A Second, Third, & Fourth Time**

**Matthew 20:1-16**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

This week’s readings and research brought about a ton of cool concepts I could have shared with you. It was actually almost kind of overwhelming to be honest. There is not always a time when I conduct research for sermons that I find so much that speaks to me. Let alone what I know I need to share to get the message across. I do know for certain though that I have to reel it back, and keep within my 10-15 minutes up here, or I will be getting some dirty looks, or I will see some people nodding off in the pews catching a few extra winks of sleep. I do not want to do that to you, and I do not want to provide any disservice to the message that needs to be reiterated and brought to life a little more here this morning.

With that being said I will also spare you with the revisiting of my sermon from 2017. As much as I thought the Ricky Bobby references from the movie Talladega Nights were cool back then, I have a little different thought and concept to get across here today. However, the cool thing is that I got to look back on that very sermon, and even draw some insight and knowledge from where I was then, and where I am now. We do indeed learn from our past, and it is ever more so important to not look at it as something that is wrong or silly. It was what I needed to share that day six years ago, and it was what God ordained for me to share with you back then. So, praise be to God for allowing me to work in the vineyard back then, and praise be to God for allowing me to continue to grow and work in his vineyard even to this very day!

So, let’s get rolling here, and let me remind you and myself of this… “God’s grace is abundant, whether we are new believers, old believers; whether we think we sin a little or a lot, God still desires to forgive us. The price of forgiveness is still the same: The blood of his Son, Jesus, on the cross.” (3) The price has indeed already been paid. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget about this very payment. We get wrapped up in what we shouldn’t, but hey we have to pay our bills don’t we? We all too often tend to look at this Gospel Reading today from a standpoint that a person feels that if they work harder or longer hours, they should get paid more wages. There indeed is actually nothing wrong with that…. That is of course if we continue to think of things in an earthly perspective. “The land owner is right; He gave the workers the amount that they agreed on. This is the way God deals with us. God’s reward system is not our own. God’s system of reward is not based on personal accomplishments or hard work, but based on love.” (4) However, “The main reason this reward system seems so unfair is that we have no control over it. We can’t work hard and receive our rewards, because Christ did it all for us. He paid the price that we could never pay. He gave up his very life on the cross in order for us to receive all of God’s promised rewards. The greatest reward of all is eternal life with God our Father.” (4)

The other cool thing is that it does not matter when we are called, like those who leave the marketplace and go work in the vineyard. It also does not matter how many times we are called either, as we humans tend to err often, or we just plainly do not always hear or follow the call that will lead to everlasting life in the kingdom. Some of us are indeed more ready to commit, and some of us double guess things, and we need another call to come back to where it is that God desires us to be. Then, of course there are those of us who were off in the bathroom when the vineyard owner comes through town and calls us to work. Thank God he comes back to the marketplace a second, third, and even fourth time so that we do not miss out on the most awesome opportunity of all!

We are also reminded that “Some of us were recruited early; about the third hour. We were baptized as infants and became one of God’s children. For others it took God coming to us a little later in life. And for others it will take God until the eleventh hour to bring them into the kingdom. But, never the less, we will be there. God made us a promise and God never gives up on us. He has called us by his grace to be His own.” (4) God’s grace is indeed abundant, and he pays it out to each and every one of us.

So, let me quit preaching at you here for a little bit. Let me share a pretty cool story I read throughout my research this week. Unfortunately, there is no specific author for this story, other than the sermon writer himself. So, let me share this story from David Roth, and his sermon, "All In A Day’s Work.” “There was a cobbler who lived in a small town. He was good at making shoes, and made them for all the people of the village. One day, a shoe factory came to town. The big factory hired many people, and they worked for the factory and they made shoes. The cobbler did not go to work for the factory. But he saw the kind of shoes it was making. He said, “I know how to make those shoes. I can do that.” He heard that the factory was paying nice wages to the people who worked there, and it had a good pension plan, too.” (5)

“The cobbler wanted the nice wages and the retirement, but he did not go to the factory to work. Instead, he got busy in his shop. He made shoes just like the factory shoes. Boxes and boxes and boxes of shoes. When he had made many shoes, he loaded them all up, and he went to the factory with his shoes. He showed them to the owner of the factory. “See all of these shoes I have made for you. Now pay me the wages and enroll me in your retirement plan.” The owner said, “These are good shoes. You may have thought you were making them for me, but you were not on my team. I did not ask you to make these. I do not owe you anything.” The cobbler was angry, but he was speechless. So, he gathered up all his shoes and went back to his shop.” (5)

“What was the problem for the shoemaker? Did he not make enough shoes, or good enough shoes? No, he had many shoes, and even the factory owner said they were good shoes. But he wanted to do it his own way. The cobbler was not part of the factory team. Sometimes we want to cobble together our own deal with God. We want to stay in our own shop, our own world. Live life our own way. It’s a deal that looks fair to us. But it’s not the deal that God has offered. God is God, and He comes to us on His terms, not ours. Someone which said to me that he was just going to try his best, and that he thought that should be good enough. I told him that when he builds his own heaven, then he can make his own rules. But if he wants to go to God’s heaven, then it’s God’s rules.” (5)

It is simply amazing that we all too often feel that we can do things our own way. We miss out on the most valuable purpose and calling because we, just like the cobbler and the workers in the vineyard, feel that our way is the right way. We mix the earthly concepts up with the God ordained purposes and reasons. We all too often feel that our way, or our level of work, is that which is going to get us into the kingdom. We lose sight of the very reason that we even have that opportunity. If our focus is not always on God, then we will miss the mark every time. We cannot and will not succeed by doing things our own way. So, let us take heed to the very calling of the vineyard owner and let us go to work in his field gathering the crop, or gathering others to join us in God’s eternal kingdom, and let us leave our earthly concepts and confusion behind.

We are also provided with this comforting reminder as well. “As Christians, we have work to do, but we do not work to get into the kingdom of God. We work because we are already in the kingdom, we are on God’s team. The early workers forgot this. They did not focus on what the owner had done for them.” (5) So, I pray that we do not lose that very focus, and I pray that we continue to have that ever constant focus and hunger on serving God, and more so inviting and welcoming others into the fold. The payment is eternal, and we will all receive the best wage and gift possible, for God’s grace is indeed abundant. The more important part is that we do not get so caught up in this world, and on self. Let us not get caught up on what we think we deserve, and let us realize that our brothers and sisters deserve the exact same gift that we receive as well. Let us not leave anyone behind because of our anger, greed, frustration, or even our thought that we may indeed be better or in more of a right standing with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us share the prize with others so that we can all live in abundance in his kingdom!

So, as I close things off here this morning, let’s actually go back to the very beginning of our Gospel Reading today. Let us remember how we were actually grounded right out of the proverbial starting block here today. We again are reminded that, “Jesus begins the parable with “The kingdom of heaven is like…,” reinforcing the guiding principle of his entire ministry—namely, the announcement that the kingdom of God is drawing near.” (1) We may not know the time or the hour, but we know it is always getting closer. Jesus is eager to make sure that he does not miss anyone. “Jesus is determined to come back to the marketplace time after time, hour after hour, to gather up anyone who happens to be standing idly by.” (1) Thank God he has seen past any and all of our flaws and doubts as human beings! Thank God that he has ever constant love, courage, and determination to never stop calling us and has indeed come back out to the marketplace in this very world to call us a second, third, and fourth time!

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year A 2023

 September 24th, 2023

 17th Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Bible.com

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 God Gives Believers What Is Right In His Sight

 Contributed by Timm Meyer on Oct 4, 2004

 Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

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(4) SermonCentral.com

 What Is Fair?

 Contributed by Byrene Haney on May 20, 2005

 Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

 Denomination: Lutheran

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 "All In A Day’s Work”

 Contributed by David Roth on Oct 5, 2020

 Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 20:1-16**

 Jesus tells a parable about God’s generosity, challenging the common

 assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or

 deserve.

 [Jesus said to the disciples:] 1“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who

 went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2After agreeing

 with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3When

 he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace;

 4and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever

 is right.’ So they went. 5When he went out again about noon and about three

 o’clock, he did the same. 6And about five o’clock he went out and found others

 standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’

 7They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go

 into the vineyard.’ 8When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his

 manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and

 then going to the first.’ 9When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them

 received the usual daily wage. 10Now when the first came, they thought they

 would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11And

 when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12saying, ‘These

 last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne

 the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13But he replied to one of them,

 ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily

 wage? 14Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same

 as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to

 me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16So the last will be first, and

 the first will be last.”