

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the twentieth chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

*"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> "Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> "And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> "and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. <sup>5</sup> "Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. <sup>6</sup> "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup> "They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will*

*receive.'* <sup>8</sup> "So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.' <sup>9</sup> "And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> "But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. <sup>11</sup> "And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> "saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.' <sup>13</sup> "But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> 'Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. <sup>15</sup> 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' <sup>16</sup> "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."

Heavenly Father, sanctify us by the truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

In preparation for this sermon I was thinking about some of the activities that our church is planning on doing or at least considering doing. One of these is to help a student go to college and offer a scholarship to said student. Now, why on earth would I equate this text with what we want to do? Well, after reading this text I got to thinking, maybe instead of offering a scholarship to the “best” student... just maybe we should offer it to the “worst.” Maybe we offer it to the person with the lowest graduating GPA, and if not maybe we find someone who is a little bit lower on the ‘totem pole’ to offer our help to. I mean is that not one of the principles that Jesus is trying to get across to us in our lesson today?

As we know in parables Jesus is telling an earthly story to get across a heavenly meaning. The earthly story is one of people working in a vineyard and the point is that the last will be first and the first last... makes sense, doesn't it? Well maybe at first glance it does not, but dear

friends in Christ, once we explore this text and parable a little more then we can see how we are *laboring for Christ*... regardless of when we were called.

This parable begins with Jesus telling a story of a landowner who goes out to call people to work for Him. Now these parts are all reasonably easy to pin down, are they not? The vineyard is the kingdom of heaven also known as the church. The landowner is Jesus or God. And the laborers are us. We are the ones standing around doing nothing until God calls us to come and work for Him.

So we have a picture of God coming all throughout history calling men at different times to come and work for Him. He called them early in history and even to this most present day. He calls us to be faithful workers in His vineyard, and He calls us with the offer that He made to those He called long ago... the same reward for His laborers regardless of how long they worked for Him.

And this... this fact that everyone receives the same gift, rubs many people the wrong way and thus forces many to abandon true Christianity. To think that Helen at over ninety years old receives the same gift as Hannah who is a mere nine months old... how is that even remotely fair? To think that Lawrence had to, as the parable puts it, "borne the burden and the heat of the day," and Jonah and Matthew haven't 'worked' a day in their lives, just does not seem fair at all.

And this is what those in the parable are expressing. Those who were called early in the day had to work throughout the entire heat of the day, suffering under harsh conditions and sweating profusely... while others came in at the end of the day and they get the same payment... That is NOT FAIR, right? Think about your own life, at your job who should get the promotion: a person who has been there for years or some new guy who just started? Or think about the example I gave at the beginning of the sermon, who should we give the scholarship to: the one who has 'worked hard for grades' or the one who just barely gets by?

You see, to us and to our sinful human nature it is only right that those who work hard are the ones who are rewarded... and rewarded very handsomely. Just as Jesus shared in the parable, so it is true for us also, "But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more." Do we not think the same thing often? While we will all get heaven, maybe I will get a higher place than those who came after me. Maybe instead of having to go to heaven and share my spot with someone else, maybe there is a grading in heaven based upon how many years you've been a Christian, maybe it's based upon the hardships you had to suffer, maybe it is based upon how many good works I've done [at least that is the message of many churches today]... or maybe it is based on God's love and justice.

And according to God's justice, you deserve nothing. According to God's justice you deserve hell for all eternity. When you look at your life you know how horrible you have been, how often you have disobeyed God. You look at the choices you've made and you know

that you have put your own wants and desires above those of God... and you know that you have sinned. Quite honestly at that point in time, you have made yourself a god... and you do not deserve His mercy nor do you deserve His heaven. When you place your own wants and desires over and against those of God, you deserve hell... and we all do this, just as those who were hired first did.

Thus God answers them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ... Or is your eye evil because I am good?” And it is interesting how, even in God’s mercy we can find cause for anger and resentment. God chooses to be merciful to all and we take umbrage with this. Consider Jonah, who wanted Ninevah destroyed though they repented... and sadly we feel this way at times too. That murderer ‘repented’ and gets to go to heaven, really? That pedophile ‘repented’ and gets to be in heaven with me? That adulterer ‘repented’ and is forgiven? Yes!

Thanks be to God the answer is a resounding “Yes!” God in His wisdom and mercy sent His

Son Jesus Christ into this world to live a perfect life. He sent Jesus to suffer and die on the cross. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to come and live and die for all of us. He lived for the many times that we are not perfect. He lived for the many times that we do not perfectly fulfill God’s laws. He lived for all the times that we are angry or disappointed in God’s mercy.

And to make atonement, to make payment for all of our sins Jesus suffered and died. He was beaten, mocked, hung on a cross and died. He bore the weight of all sins of all time as He hung on that cross dying. In fact, on that cross, Jesus suffered hell itself, taking our punishment upon Himself... so that we might have heaven waiting for us. And now through faith in all that Jesus has done, we have heaven waiting for us.

And is this not the point of the parable? God called each and every one of us to labor for Him. And as we look to the end of life, the evening, we see that those who came well after us and even those who have not been as ‘perfect’ as we are will get the same pay that

we will. That does not seem fair... and yet, God is perfectly fair and just. God's mercy extends to all of His children whom He has chosen to be His own.

And instead of being mad at God for being so loving, so caring as to save all of these people... maybe we should be eternally thankful that He has called us, that He has chosen us. For even as He says, "many are called, but few are chosen." And dear friend through faith you are chosen in Christ to be a child of God for all eternity. Thank God that He has chosen me to be His child, so that I can spend all of eternity with Him and with all of "His chosen" in His heaven.

Dear friends in Christ, maybe we should give that scholarship to the person with the lowest graduating GPA. While they may not have been the best academic student, maybe this is the push they need to succeed at something else... and maybe this is the push from God that they need to seek Him out all the more.

Of course, it does not matter who we give money to or if we give money at all... what matters is that in all we do, we labor, we trust, we believe in Jesus Christ and in all that He has done for us. And we take that message of Jesus to the world around us, to all of His children who need to hear the word of God.

Thank God that He has called us out of the darkness of our sins and into the light that is His Son. Thank God that He has chosen us to be His children, children who are awaiting their heavenly inheritance. And thank God that He has not only been just with us, but more importantly, He has been merciful not giving us what our sins deserve, but what His Son's perfect life and death have deserved.

Thanks be to God. Amen.