

16th Sunday after Pentecost 2017

Matthew 20:1-16.

HYMNS: 557, (555 first 4 verses and then verse 10),

854, 851, 622, 923.

INTROIT: Psalm 27:1-9.

P The LORD is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear?

C **The LORD is the Fortress of my life. Of whom should I be afraid?**

P When evildoers came against me to devour my flesh,

C **my oppressors and my enemies stumbled and fell.**

P If an army were to pitch camp against me, my heart would not be afraid.

C **If a war were to break out against me, in this I would be confident.**

P One thing I have asked of the LORD. That I shall seek,

C **that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD, and to reflect in His temple.**

P For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble.

C **He will conceal me under the cover of His tent. He will set me high on a rock.**

P Now my head will be high above my enemies all around me.

C **Therefore I shall offer sacrifices in His tent with shouts of joy. I shall sing and make music to praise the LORD.**

P Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud!

C **Be gracious to me and answer me!**

P When You said, "Seek My face!" my heart said to You,

C **"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."**

P Do not hide Your face from me!

ALL: Do not turn Your servant away in anger! You have been my Help. Do not cast me off or abandon me, O God of my salvation!

COLLECT: Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything that we have done, help us to trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 55:6-9.

Epistle: Philippians 1:12-14, 19-20.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all Amen.

The text for our sermon for this Sunday is written in the book of Matthew 20:1-16 which was our gospel reading before.

1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. **2** He agreed with the workers to pay them a denarius a day and sent them into his vineyard. **3** About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. **4** He told them, 'You also go into the vineyard! I shall pay you whatever is right.' **5** So they went.

"He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. **6** About the eleventh hour he went out and found some others standing around. He asked them, 'Why are you standing here all day long doing nothing?'"

7 "They answered him, 'Because nobody has hired us.'

"He told them, 'You also go into the vineyard!'"

8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his manager, ‘Call the workmen, and give them their pay! Begin with the last and go on to the first!’

9 “Those who began working about the eleventh hour came, and each received a denarius. 10 When the first ones came, they expected that they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. 11 Although they took it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 They said, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have endured the burden and the heat of the day.’

13 “He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. You agreed with me on a denarius, did you not? 14 Take what is yours and go! I want to give this last man as much as I have given you. 15 Or do I not have the right to do what I please with what is mine? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

16 “In this way the last will be first and the first last.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

In the Gospel that we heard this morning is part of a longer teaching. Jesus has basically been teaching that everyone who enters the kingdom of God does so by a miracle of God. He has recently taught that the chances of a rich person entering heaven are not even as good as the chances of a camel passing through the eye of a needle. When we understand that the culture of the day believed that rich people were especially favoured by God, then we understand that Jesus was saying basically that no one has a chance. Jesus looked straight at them and said: **“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”** [Matthew 19:26.] With these words we learn that our entry into the kingdom of God is a miracle.

Then Jesus went on to say something else that's contrary to our understanding. He said, **"However, many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."** Jesus then illustrated this with the parable we heard in today's Gospel.

Back when I was an carpenter, I worked for a company that often hired workers from the CES job center. Most of the time, we did our contracts with our own employees, but from time-to-time we would land a large project and we hired extra workers from the CES [*Commonwealth Employment Service*]. Those workers were paid by the hour. The longer they worked; the more pay they received. This is pretty much the way it has been from the first time that one person hired another person to work for them.

In today's Gospel, Jesus began talking about a similar situation. The labourers in that day marketed their services at the local market which was usually located on the main road that entered the city from the countryside. The landowner had a major project going on in his vineyard and went to the market early in the day and hired workers. A little later in the morning, he returned to the market and hired more workers. There's nothing unusual so far.

It's later in the day that things start to get unusual. There comes a point in time when hiring more workers is counterproductive. The ninth hour would be about 3:00 p.m. and it was very unusual to hire anyone at that time. It was unheard of to hire anyone at the eleventh hour ... an hour before quitting time. The hour would pretty much be over by the time they walked out to the vineyard, located the foreman, and received their instructions. There wouldn't be much time left for them to do any productive work for the landowner. Nevertheless, Jesus tells of a landowner who is still hiring at the eleventh hour.

So the landowner in Jesus' parable is already starting to look crazy when he hires people at the ninth and eleventh hours, but that is nothing compared to his pay policy. When it is time to pay the workers at the end of the day, the crazy landowner paid the eleventh hour workers first and he paid them a whole day's pay! As the steward continued to pay the workers, the labourers who had been in the vineyard since dawn began to think they were in line for a bonus. After all, if the guys who barely had time to walk out from town got a

day's pay, then they should get a lot more. As it turned out, their rationalizations were unrealistic. They also received a day's pay ... no more ... no less.

It's then the grumbling began. Notice that the problem is not the amount of the pay. The landowner paid according to their agreement. They cannot say they were robbed. Listen to the complaint again. 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. The real problem is jealousy.

Jealousy is a nasty business. There's an old fable about two brothers. They lived together in perfect harmony for many years, with never a quarrel. One day a magic genie appeared to the younger brother and said, "You and your brother are about to reap your reward. You may ask for anything, and it will be yours as long as you ask before sundown. But one thing: your brother will receive double of whatever you wish."

How wonderful! What should he wish for? The sky was the limit. Then jealousy struck. The realization suddenly struck a nerve, "My brother will receive twice what I ask for." He couldn't make up his mind. The sun was about the dip into the horizon and the wish was still not spoken. Finally, the elder brother seized the younger by the throat and screamed in his face, "Wish! Wish or I'll choke you!" Gasping for air, he blurted out, "I wish . . . I wish . . . I wish to be blind in one eye!" Jealousy can have disastrous results.

There are many examples of this today. How many people bear a grudge against wealthy people simply because they are rich? How many believe that the rich become richer by ripping off the poor folk?

This kind of thinking can enter any organization, even the church. People get jealous of who has the most influence. This is sad in any organization, but it's especially sad in the church because there's one and only one person who is to have influence in the church, and that's Jesus Christ! How much grief, anguish, and division do we experience because we don't look to Jesus Christ and His Word as the ultimate influence among us?

The parable Jesus told in today's Gospel fights this. As I have said before, the generous person in a parable usually represents God. The work day in this parable represents a lifetime. Sometimes parents bring their children to the font and those children belong to Christ throughout their lives and on into eternity. These are the dawn labourers. Other times, God brings people into the church on the deathbed. These are the eleventh hour labourers. God brings people into the church at other times in their lives as well. These are the labourers hired at other times in the day. The point is that God can bring people into His church at any time in life ... even in the last micro second of the last minute. If that sounds crazy just remember who created and controls time.

In the end, God pays us all with the same pay. It's the pay that Jesus earned when He took our jealousy and all our other sins to the cross. With His suffering and death He earned the wage of forgiveness, life, and salvation for the world. He certified the validity of His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil by rising from the dead on the third day. All the people in the vineyard receive the same pay, life forever in the gracious presence of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This parable illustrates the idea that you are not more important than other Christians simply because you have been a Christian for a long time. In the same way, you are not less important than other Christians simply because you have not been a Christian for very long. For those who have loved ones who do not believe, this parable reminds us that it is never too late. As long as a person is still alive, the Holy Spirit can work faith in them.

On the other hand, don't make the mistake of waiting until the last minute because of this parable. You don't know if you will die during your sleep this evening. You don't know that a drunk driver will not kill you before you get home from this service. Now may be your eleventh hour. Now is the day of salvation.

Jesus said, "**However, many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.**" Sadly, many who think they are first in the line going to heaven will learn that they were hypocrites and fooled even themselves. Many others who are last and appear to be headed for hell will be a wonderful surprise for their loved ones who follow them to the Lord's side. What a joyful surprise it'll be to see someone who appeared to be last is actually first.

However it's dangerous to compare ourselves to other people. When we do that, we take our eyes off of Jesus. Our salvation is not based on how much better we are than the other guy. It's based on the price Jesus paid on the cross. He is the one who earned our salvation. He is the object of the faith that saves ... the faith that the Holy Spirit works in us.

Dear friends, the idea that our work for the church earns us points with God is so seductive. Only the power of God that comes from the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ can save us from its subtle attraction, this temptation of the Devil. The love that flows from that cross shows us that God already holds us in the highest place in His heart. It's this love at work in us that motivates us while we live on this earth. It's His love at work in us that will keep us in His arms forever.

God continues to search the market place of this world looking for workers for His vineyard. The Holy Spirit may find workers in the market place early in the morning when, as infants, He works faith in us through the Word combined with the water of Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit may find us in the market and give us faith at the exhalation of the last breath before sun down. He may find us sometime in between. No matter when we receive this faith, we know that all the guilt of every sin is gone – taken away by the Son's sacrifice on the cross. We know that, by His resurrection and ascension, our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared a place for us. Whether our faith is old or young, we all receive the gift of life everlasting. Amen. The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

3rd Hymn: 854,

Prayer of the Church 14th Sunday after Pentecost

P Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief Silence.

P For our eternal lives, that we may receive God's promised inheritance not because of His law but because of His promise to Abraham and to us, and for repentance, that we may be granted a right understanding of God's law and that it would convict us of our sin and our need for forgiveness in Christ Jesus, and for a spirit of caring, that the Holy Spirit would grant us a love like the love Jesus has for us, a love that is willing to show mercy to our neighbours even when it's inconvenient or dangerous or might cost us our lives, Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For our lives in Christ, that we may seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while His is near, and forsake all wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts, and for spiritual wisdom, that when we do not comprehend God's works, the Holy Spirit would teach us to believe that our thoughts are not His thoughts and our ways are not His ways, Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For trust in times of struggle, that in the midst of difficult times, we may be given a confident faith like Paul had when he was in prison, a faith that knows our Father is using our troubles for the good of the Gospel and to turn us to Him, and for a manner of life worthy of the Gospel, that we may imitate Christ, who, though He was first, for our sakes willingly made Himself last, Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For grateful lives, that whether we were called to faith at the first hour or the eleventh hour, our hearts and mouths and lives would be filled with praise and amazement that the generosity of Jesus has given us salvation we do'nt deserve, and for joy in service, that we may never cease rejoicing that we have been given the privilege of working in our gracious Master's vineyard, and the certainty of salvation now and of heaven to come, that we, with Paul, would believe that to live is Christ and to die is gain, Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For the opportunity to suffer, that we may have the privilege not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for His sake, For everyone in civil authority, that we may be granted good government, faithful

leaders, and peaceful times, For our daily needs, that our land would be blessed with good weather and fruitful crops, Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For the youngest members of God's kingdom, that the Lord bless them and keep them safe, and the Lord would give each parent patience and wisdom to nurture their children, that He would bless those who teach and those who learn in our Sunday School, and that even when they face temptations and challenges, He would keep our children faithful to Him all their lives, Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P P We pray that God would deliver, the dying from their fear, the troubled from their afflictions, the grieving from their sorrow and the sick from their infirmity [*especially*]May all who cry to You in their need receive grace according to Your merciful will. Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For those who commune this day at the Lord's altar, that they may find peace and life as they eat the Lord's life-giving body and drink His death-defying blood....Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P For the saints who have gone before us, let us give thanks and praise to God. That we may look forward with sure confidence to the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting....Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P Graciously receive our prayers, O Lord, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honour, and worship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 851,