

Pentecost 15            9/21/14  
St. Matthew 20:1-16    20A

“AM I NOT ALLOWED TO DO WHAT I CHOOSE WITH WHAT BELONGS TO ME? OR DO YOU BEGRUDGE MY GENEROSITY?”

There is an old legend about two brothers. They lived together for 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 is a nasty business and jealousy can have disastrous results.

In our Gospel lesson for this Sunday, Jesus is teaching us that we are not to compare ourselves to our neighbors, thinking that we are better than they are, that we have earned more of God’s grace and deserve more of God’s favor. **JESUS IS TEACHING US THAT GOD DOES NOT DEAL WITH US AS OUR SINS DESERVE. HE DEALS WITH US ONLY IN GRACE, GRACE IN HIS OWN SON, JESUS CHRIST.**

I. We are by our very human natures works righteous. We trust in ourselves for our righteousness before God. And, we show our self-

righteousness by expecting God to reward us because we believe we are better than our neighbor.

God demanded of us, "Be holy, as I am holy." Created in His image, we are to be a perfect reflection our God. But, it's no fun to compare ourselves to God; that only shows us our sin. So, in the folly of our sinful thinking, we stop trying to be like God and compare ourselves to our neighbors. That is what the workers did in our parable.

In our lesson, the owner of the vineyard took it upon himself to go looking for workers in his vineyard. He did not want for anyone to come to him. He makes the agreement with the workers that he hires throughout the day, that they would receive a denarius -- a day's pay -- for their labors.

Then Jesus says this, "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first'". And that's when jealousy reared its ugly head! Those who were hired first thought they would receive more wages than those hired last. When they received the same wages, notice their reaction. They do not rejoice in their neighbor's fortune. They do not thank the landowner for his generosity. Quite the opposite, "they grumbled at the master of the house, saying '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.'"

In the death of our sin, we share that same sentiment, "he who dies with the most toys, wins," right!?

- If I have more money, I'm a better person than my neighbor.
- If my kids don't get in trouble and make the honor roll, that means I'm a better parent than, well, you know who...
- If I don't have trouble in my marriage, it means I'm a better Christian than, well, you know who...

- If I don't suffer illness or if tragedy does not strike my family, it means God loves me more than, well, you know who...

Its fun to compare ourselves to our neighbor, isn't it? Why is it fun to compare ourselves to our neighbor? We win! We win, every time, because we make the rules, we set the standard.

In the parable, the workers were offended by the grace and goodness of the landowner. Some thought they were entitled to more. In that same way, we are offended by the grace and goodness of God. The workers got themselves in trouble when they compared themselves with the other workers. And, we get ourselves into trouble when we compare ourselves to our neighbors.

The Christian life is the life of repentance. With His words in the parable this Sunday, Jesus wants us to examine ourselves. Do you really think of yourself as being better than your neighbor? Do you truly believe God loves you more than your neighbor? Do you actually expect special status with God and His extra favor because you have done more or contributed more than your neighbor?

II. The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that God deals with us only in grace. Eternal life in the Kingdom of heaven is given to us by grace. We do not earn it by the works of the Law. After all, if God paid according to the Law, we would all die and perish in hell, for "the wages of sin is death". But, the Gospel teaches us, "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ro 6:23).

In the parable, the landowner takes the initiative. The workers do not come to Him looking for work. He goes looking for them.

In our study of the Augsburg Confession, we are going to look at Jesus and justification. In the death of our sin, we cannot save ourselves.

So, God sent His Son, Jesus, to atone for our sin, that we might be declared righteous in Jesus.

In their jealousy, you can just hear the cries of those workers who have bore the heat of day and the sweat of their brow being paid the same as those who worked one hour, crying, "It's just not fair."

You know what isn't fair? What Jesus endured for us and for our salvation. Jesus has borne the burden of us all and paid the only wages that we truly deserve -- the wages of sin, which is death. Early in the morning He was hauled before Pilate; from the 3rd hour until the 6th hour He suffered in our place upon the Cross; and at the 11th hour He was buried in the tomb, from which He rose the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

He endured it all, not as punishment for His sin, but for you!

Today, September 21<sup>st</sup>, is the Commemoration of St. Matthew in the liturgical calendar of the Church. Before we look at the life and faith of Matthew, allow me to mention why we remember and celebrate the lives of the saints. No, we do not pray to them or seek their help in living a Christian life, but we do remember them as examples of God's mercy, imitate their faith, and follow them in all virtuous and godly.

Matthew stands for us as an example that God treats us in grace, not as our sins deserve. To the Romans, he was a despised Jew. To his fellow Jews, he was a traitor and collaborator with Rome. But, he was precious to Jesus. The Savior stopped at his tax collector's booth and said, "Follow me."

It was not because of his charming personality or his character that God choose Matthew, it was grace. And, it wasn't Matthew's wisdom or human reason that caused him to follow Jesus, it was grace, grace that

gave him faith to hear the Master's call and follow Him. Matthew followed our Lord, wrote the Gospel that bears His name, and proclaimed Jesus, especially among his fellow Jews.

Like Matthew, God does not treat you as your sins deserve. He treats you in grace. And He calls you and, through the Means of Grace, gives you faith so that you may follow Him. And, as you follow Him in faith, you will do good works which serve your neighbor. Like He did with Matthew, God will use your words, your hands, your feet, your checkbook, your life to accomplish great things. He serves your neighbor through you. Which is why we pray this day, "...since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word.  
To God be the Glory. Amen.