

Pentecost 16 9/24/17
Matthew 20:1-16 20A

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

We have rules, and even if they are unwritten rules, you know them. Like standing in line, for example. Waiting in line means waiting your turn. When someone cuts in line, you know it's just plain wrong! Right?

Knowing those rules of life, you hear the words of Jesus in our Gospel this morning, and they just sound so bizarre. In fact, they may even seem unfair, unjust. How can someone who has worked only one hour be paid the same as one who has toiled in the hot sun and labored since dawn?

In the parable before this morning, Jesus is not a business advisor teaching us how to run our business. No, Jesus is teaching us THAT OUR STANDING WITH GOD AND OUR PLACE IN HEAVEN IS NOT BASED UPON OUR WORKS, BUT UPON THE GRACE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST.

Maybe, if we take a step back and look at the context, it will help us understand the parable better. In chapter 19, immediately before our lesson for this Sunday begins, a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life" (Mt 19:16). Jesus tells him that whoever keeps the Law – PERFECTLY – will be saved and the rich young man boasts, "All these I have kept." Jesus tells him to go and sell all his possessions, and the young man goes away sad. He boasts about keeping the Commandments, yet the truth is is that he could not even keep the first. He feared, loved, and trusted in his possessions more than in Jesus.

Then, Jesus goes on to teach the disciples that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (v. 24). And, we must understand that “rich” here does not have a lot of money, but “rich” in terms of self-righteousness, trusting that you can save yourselves by your works. The disciples were greatly astonished at hearing that they could not save themselves, and asked, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 25). To answer that question, Jesus tells the parable of the Laborers in the vineyard, our Gospel reading for this Sunday.

- I. We are by our natures, works righteous. And, we show our self-righteousness by expecting God to reward us because we believe we are better than our neighbor.

In our lesson, the owner of the vineyard 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 workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first’” (v. 8). 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.

“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’” (vv.11-12)

In the death of our sin, we share that same sentiment. In the shallow self-centered of our sinful self, we judge ourselves by our outward wealth, talent, popularity, even our beauty. You know what I mean, don't ya? Sure ya do, because you see it and think it every day. If I wear \$ 75 jeans, I'm a

better person than someone who wears \$ 25 jeans. If my kid doesn't get into trouble and starts on the sports team, it means I'm a better person than those parents whose kid got arrested. If I drive a newer and bigger pickup than my neighbor, I'm a better person. If I hit the golf ball farther and straighter than my neighbor, I'm a better person. Sound familiar?

The point of our parable is this: Jesus wants us to examine ourselves. Do you truly believe God loves you more than your neighbor? Do you actually expect special status with God and His favor because you have done more or contributed more than your neighbor?

II. We are not saved by our works. We are saved by the generosity of God in Jesus Christ.

The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that God does not deal with us as our sins deserve, He deals with us in grace.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He was baptized by John in the Jordan River. When Jesus came to John, he tried to prevent Jesus. In Matthew 3:15, Jesus says to John, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus "fulfilled all righteousness" for us. Perhaps, we should say in English, "to complete all righteousness." Jesus came to win righteousness for us. Jesus has borne the burden of us all and paid the only wages that we truly have earned and deserved, that is, 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 to life everlasting. Christ paid the wages of sin, not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood, His innocent suffering and death.

By virtue of our baptism into Christ, we have died to sin and all unholy

desires and we have been raised to a new creation in Christ Jesus.

III. What does this mean? What does this mean for our thoughts, words, and deeds? We do not compare ourselves to others, expecting God's reward and favor. Instead, we seek to reach out to our neighbor and serve them as God has served us in Christ.

When you were Baptized, you were called to work in His Kingdom in the vocations in which God, in His infinite wisdom, placed you. Every day, we return to the waters of our baptism to drown our sinful flesh to rise to life in Christ to serve our neighbor according to the duties of our vocation. Living in Christ, we serve, as did St. Paul.

Paul was a sinner, and by the grace of God, he knew it. He knew that he was not saved because of who he was or what he did. He knew that God had saved him in Christ.

So, Paul could say, "what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (Ph 1:12). When Paul wrote these words, he was imprisoned in Rome. Paul knew that God had used all of his life -- even the bad -- to advance the Gospel, so that by his witness, even the imperial guards of the Roman army were turning in faith to Jesus Christ.

Then, Paul could say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Ph 1:21). Whether he lived or died, he knew that Christ would be glorified. If he died, Paul knew that he would be forever with the Lord. If he lived, he would continue his labors and do even more for Christ. Either way, it would be evident to everyone what the Lord, by His grace, can accomplish in our lives for the good of His kingdom and the welfare of our neighbor.

God does great things through us -- our lives, our words, our hands, our feet, our checkbooks. God does great things through our council members and elders, Sunday School teachers, LWML members, those

who greet you as you come to the services of God's house, those who make coffee for Bible class, those who give a neighbor a ride to church.

No, in the burdens and scorching heat of earthly life in these last days, it is not easy. But, Christ is with us, feeding us through His Word and His Body and Blood, that we may daily die to sin and cling in faith to Christ and be Christ to our neighbor.

To God be the Glory. Amen.