

Pentecost 17 9/24/23
St. Matthew 20:1-16 20A

FOR MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS, NEITHER ARE YOUR WAYS MY WAYS, DECLARES THE LORD.

There is an old legend 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 is a nasty business and jealousy leads to disaster, My Friends in Christ.

This Sunday, we hear God declare, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Is 55:8). In the folly of our sinful thinking, we think that we are better than our neighbor and deserve more of God's grace and favor. But, today we learn that GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAY. AND WHAT GLORIOUS GOOD NEWS THAT IS OUR FOR US. 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 nature 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.

That is exactly what is happening with the workers in the parable before us this morning. To help us understand, let me go back to the verses before the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The rich young man comes to Jesus and says, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life” (19:16). And Jesus says, “Uff da!” And tells him to so sell all that he has, because the Savior knows He loves his stuff more than he loves Jesus. And the Evangelist tells us the young man *went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (19:22)*.

Then Jesus proceeds to tell the Twelve that it is “*easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God*” (19:24). To which Peter, again speaking for all of them, answers, “*We have left everything and followed you. What then will we have (19:27)?*” And Jesus says, “Uff da!” And then tells the parable in our lesson to teach that God’s ways our not our ways.

In the parable, the owner of the vineyard goes out looking for workers – notice He doesn’t wait for them to come to Him – and hires them throughout the day with the promise that they would receive a day’s wages for their labors.

Then evening came, 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' (vs. 11-12).

Notice clearly what's happening here – they are basing their standing with the owner by what they have done. They deserve more from the owner because they are better than their neighbor. And, we do the same thing. In the death of our sin, if I have more money; if I don't have trouble in my marriage; if my child is the star of the sports team; if I wear more expensive designer jeans than my neighbor, it means I'm better than my neighbor and God loves me more than my neighbor, right?.

It's fun to compare ourselves to our neighbor – in our eyes, they've only worked 1 hour, and look at all I've done! Look Jesus, "I've left everything and followed you. What then will I have?" It's the same sentiment as the rich young man and the Twelve. It's all about me...me, me, me.

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's ways are not our ways!

At the very moment of Adam's mutiny and Eve's rebellion in the Garden, God might have given vent to His fury and turned this universe and all which it contains into a fireball.

But that is not what God did. Cherish those words, Dear Child of God: God's ways aren't our ways and His thoughts aren't ours, either.

Rather than taking immediate revenge and exacting eternal retribution, the Lord acted in grace and promised to send His Son as a Savior who would pay the price of our disobedience.

God knew that in the death of our sin, we could not save ourselves. So in His love, God saved us. And, here's how He did it: *When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Ga 4:4-5).*

God's ways are not our ways – and that means His only-begotten Son bore the burden of us all and paid the only wages that we truly deserve -- the wages of sin, which is death. God's ways are not our ways; and oh, what sweet comfort that sentence gives, for He would rather see His Son die so that you would not die and perish in your sin. And Jesus did die the death of your sin on Calvary's cross, and that means that you're forgiven. And He rose the 3rd day, bringing life and immortality to light.

That life and that immortality is all yours because of your Baptism into Christ. In that washing of rebirth, you died to sin and all unholy desires and been raised to a new creation in Christ Jesus.

III. What does this mean? What does it mean for our Christian faith and life? 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.

Which brings us to the words of St. Paul in our Epistle this Sunday, *what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel (Ph 1:12)*. It always amazes me that when Paul wrote those words, he was in prison, in prison for preaching the Gospel. Paul was a sinner, and by the

grace of God, he knew it. He knew that what he was he was because of God's grace in Jesus Christ. God's grace molded and conformed him to the image of Christ, so that he could be Christ to his neighbor. Even now, even now imprisoned, God was using him to advance the Gospel, that even the imperial guard of the Roman army was turning in faith to Jesus Christ.

God's grace has called you and sculpted you in the image of Christ, so that He can use your live, your words, your hands, your feet, your checkbook to advance the Gospel. 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.