

## **Homily – Proper 20 – A – Matthew 20**

**Text – Matthew 20:15 – “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?”**

How many of you, when you heard or read the parable in our text, thought those who went out to work first got a raw deal? According to our Protestant work ethic, we’d say, “Yes”. After all, they put in a full day’s work. They **had borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat**, doing their best to get the job done. Surely, the vineyard manager could see that and not only give them the wage they agreed upon but also maybe give them a little more for being so dedicated. In their eyes, it would not be fair to pay them on an equal scale as those who didn’t put in a full day’s work who they felt were not worthy to an equal wage.

In His parable, Jesus is not addressing employee hiring methods. He is not talking about what determines fair pay for vineyard workers. Instead, He is addressing a statement and question which St. Peter addressed to the Savior. After teaching about who will enter and who will not enter the Kingdom of heaven, the apostle boldly says, “**See, we have left everything and followed You. What then will we have?**” After all, they are the first ones called to work in the Lord’s vineyard. They have put in the long hours, traveled the many miles and endured the hardships that go along with this blessed calling. Surely, they deserve to be well compensated for their labors. And, any other disciple who would join their number later on must not receive a greater blessing than they would. In their eyes, that would only be fair.

The blessed apostle missed the point. The work in God’s vineyard is not an earned wage; a sum determined by the amount of work one puts in. No, the labor in Kingdom of heaven is contract labor; one sum is set even before the first second of work is done. It is a compensation that is more than

generous and thankfully, it is a compensation that is not based on fairness. It is based on grace. Once more, Jesus shows that **His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways**. He shines the light on mankind's complaining even in the face of God's abundant generosity.

In His parable, Jesus is **the master of a house**. Even today, this loving master goes out and calls us to come and work in His blessed vineyard, to joyfully plant the seed of faith through the support of the proclamation of the Word, to nourish it through right administration of the sacraments and, by the power of the Spirit, we watch it flourish and grows. It is not easy work but it is labor which will yield abundant fruit. As we heed His call and become laborers for His vineyard, our wage is set; **a denarius**. In the time of Christ, that was considered fairly generous. It also was the usual wage for a day's unskilled labor. This generous amount is welcomed by both sides and he sends them into His vineyard. It doesn't matter when the laborer goes out and begins to work in the vineyard, the pay is the same for everyone and everyone sees this amount as good and fair and off they go.

And what is this **"denarius"**? This promised wage is far more generous than we deserve. As one comes to live and work in God's gracious and glorious Kingdom, we receive His blood – bought, cross – won forgiveness of sins, life and promise of eternal salvation. We are proclaimed innocent even though we are guilty. We have the promise of life even though we deserve only death. We are promised eternal salvation instead of the damnation we've earned. His denarius is the grandest and greatest gift of all; God's full grace based upon His promise and sealed by Jesus' blood.

At the end of the day, one would think that the vineyard would be filled with joyous workers. It would be filled with those who rejoice in their calling to work for the Lord. It would be filled with those whose minds were at ease,

knowing that they will receive a fair and quite generous compensation for all their labors. All is fair and just and right.

At the end of the day, some will collect their wage with joy and thanksgiving while others will call the master of the house's generosity into question. When those who barely broke a sweat receive the same as those who toiled and worked all day under the hot sun, these first workers start to scream, "Unfair!" They see the once agreed to wage as insufficient and they begin to complain. Surely they deserve more.

Notice how this complaint works. Those who have worked in Christ's vineyard establish themselves as model for the perfect worker. In their pride, they say that those who didn't work like them are not as worthy as they are. Such arrogance causes them to look down on those around them. Instead of loving and forgiving their fellow laborer in Christ, they judge and avoid them. These see them as the perfect model, the better worker, the better Christian. They may even have the audacity to point to others and declare that they are not "Christian enough".

The complaint even extends to the denarius of God's grace. Those who see themselves as more believe they deserve more. God's grace is nice but maybe God will bless them with other things to prove that He appreciates their labors. Maybe one believes that God's denarius is like an IOU; that by being a faithful worker, God promises to bestow upon them any earthly treasure that their hearts desire. In their minds, that would make it all fair.

**"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"** The truth of the matter is that no one forces the Lord to administer any blessing. There is no good behavior that obligates Him to be good to the person who behaves himself. No, the Lord gives His blessings without obligation, as He wishes. If

anyone has a problem with the way God carries out his goodness, the problem lies with their eyes. A person should not expect God's goodness to conform to their ideas of what is good and fair.

Rather, everyone needs to learn about God's grace. For, just as the master of the vineyard absorbed the cost for paying for all His workers, so, by His grace, Christ absorbed the cost of our sin, including our foolish grumbling and complaining. Our blessed Savior made Himself **last** in order to make us **first** in God's Kingdom. Now, we enjoy the profit of this daily wage; forgiveness, life and salvation. And, as Christ has shown His undeserved love for us, we live our lives in showing mercy and love to our fellow workers of the vineyard, our fellow Christians regardless of their age, ability, no matter how long they have been a Christian or how well or how poorly they labor in the vineyard. Like us, they have received the same glorious denarius as we have, the same abundant grace.

As we work together in God's blessed vineyard, our gracious master of the vineyard does not want to hear grumbling among His workers. He doesn't want to hear a foul word of comparison being made and expressed. Instead, rejoice. Rejoice that our labor in Christ is truly blessed. Rejoice that God doesn't give us what we deserve. Nor does He give us what is fair. Instead, He gives us His heavenly denarius, the gracious outpouring of grace that forgives our sins and strengthens our life until the day when the final evening comes and we receive His final promise, eternal life and a rest from our labors.

AMEN