

Working in the Vineyard Matthew 20:1-16 Pentecost 16 20a) Sept 20, 2020

The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ... I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.So the last will be first, and the first last. Matthew 20:1-2, 14,16 Working

Brothers and sisters in Christ, perhaps you remember the anticipation you had in school when getting a grade on a paper or a test. The teacher would come by and put your test on your desk, usually face down. I tended to lift up a corner and peek. I didn't want to rip the band-aid off too quickly - it might hurt. But I did want to know what grade I had earned. And sometimes it was in a corner and clear - an A or or a 98/ 100. And sometimes it was less clear, with just a number 90 or a percentage that looked less good, say a 70. And we'd go over the test, and teach the lesson, but I just wanted the class to end, so I could ask my friends what they'd gotten. Only then could figure out if a 70 was good and near the top or not so good and near the bottom. It was almost as if my peers gave me a grade instead of the teacher. I didn't just need to know how I did, I needed to know how I did in comparison to them.

And since tests and papers there have been personnel evaluations and raises. My teams college football rankings and baseball standings. My candidates have polls and elections and election recounts, all aimed at seeing not just how I or a team or a candidate is doing, but how are they doing compared to other people, other teams, other candidates. It looks like the way of the world. Unfortunately, it is often the way of the church. The most debated question among the disciples seems to be, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." and we are often not unlike those disciples. In fact, we still compare ourselves to the saints of scripture. We say - if only Eve hadn't eaten the fruit -with an implication we might not have. We see Peter walking on water and peter seeing the waves and sinking instead of the God who is able to make Peter stand who and lifts him up. So this parable is both the easiest for us to understand and the hardest to take to heart. So today we look again at the parable of the workers of the vineyard.

Let us look at the master first. And yes, He shows us God, our Father, and yes, He shows us Jesus, our Lord. And what does the master do? He hires workers for the vineyard. And God calls people to work in His vineyard, in His kingdom. The kingdom of God is a place where we work. That is not the first or only way to look at it, but Jesus clearly says we can look at it that way today. So one thing we can take from this parable is to listen to God's call. We just had a nominating committee for formal positions in the congregation. And there are lots of places to serve God by serving our neighbor not just through our congregation but in our our lives.

A second thing the calls tells us is the nature of the work. The master calls - continually - he seeks people for his vineyard hour after hour after hour. That is the work of our God and king, and that is the work of his people. Our work is meant to invite people in. WE need to consider that in our lives and in our church, with all that we do - how are we doing the work of inviting people into the kingdom. Because everything else we do might just be because we like doing it. We don't need to understand everything we do, but it does all relate In particular, we need to be careful of inventing new works to do that have nothing to do with our witness or our neighbor. For example, at one time I was careful in my work at the altar to make sure I turned only to the right of the church until the end of the service -then I completed the circle and

turned to the left. I quit doing that - it pointed no one to Christ or his kingdom and became a distraction from God's works. The work of the kingdom is to bring others to Christ.

A third lesson is God is generous - the master gives a fair wage to all and a generous wage to the late workers even in the parable. Yet here we will go beyond the parable. Our God outdoes the owner in the parable. He gives eternal life and salvation and his very presence to all He calls to be in his kingdom. God calls people in not because he needs their work but because he wishes to bless them. God blesses them with life and salvation, he also blesses them with useful work that grows the kingdom. WE need to work more than God needs our work. Praise and thank God for His salvation that even your work that merits nothing of itself is blessed in Him. God's blessings are given because he is generous in Christ, not due to our work and especially not due to our working harder than others. Here it might be more useful to think of us as sons and heirs, other messages scripture uses. When heirs receive their inheritance, it is not usually in relation to their work. It is because they are sons or daughters and heirs. God may have us work in the family business, but its because we are family, not because he needs workers.

Now lets get to the laborers. WE don't judge our fellow servants. We might work for their good, but we do not judge them. WE also do not judge ourselves in comparison to them. If you need to compare, compare yourself to Christ who lived a perfect life and died. Do better than that. And when you can't, praise God that he gives you life with him for Christ's sake.

This is hard - because the world teaches us to compare. Because we say it is not so for salvation but we expect it elsewhere. God's kingdom is not limited to salvation. God has redeemed the world. We are in it but not of it. He is making all things new.

Also consider the workers wages. They get a days wages each day - not because God is not generous, but because when they get more they trust in what they have and stop trusting the master. Nothing is worse than trusting in your barns and leaving the kingdom and the work God called you to rest in the good things you have stored up. The greatest gift he gives is being in his kingdom, including in tithing work.

So receive the blessings of a worker and receive the blessings of the son. Share the blessings of your generous father. He gives you all you need, even work. So celebrate as you work in the kingdom.