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Pentecost 18

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“All By Grace”

Text: Matthew 20:1-16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The parable of Jesus that we heard today is not a parable about work, but about grace. There is a vast difference between those two things. Both are good, but they see things from two different perspectives. When the workers who were hired last came forward and received a full day's wage, they understood grace. They didn't care what the others received; they probably didn't hang around to compare. They were filled with joy at the grace and generosity of the vineyard owner, and received what he gave them with thanksgiving. The workers hired first . . . well, they saw things a bit differently. They didn't look at things from a grace perspective, but from a work perspective, and so were greatly disappointed. They didn't get what they deserved, or what they had earned, or so they thought. But they did, didn't they? The master makes that clear. And so it wasn't really their work or their pay that got them upset – it was the grace and generosity of the owner. What made them grumble is what the *others* received. When they saw *that* – suddenly, their pay wasn't good enough. They wanted more.

And this happens today. Athletes that are happy with their contracts one year, want to renegotiate them the next. Why? Because someone else got more. Children filled with joy over their presents on Christmas morning feel gypped in the afternoon when they see that their friend got more. And maybe we're happy with the jobs and pay and homes that we have, *until* we see someone else with more. And suddenly, our perspective changes. Our happiness and satisfaction can so easily turn to jealousy and grumbling. And it is not because of what we have received, that it's not fair! Most, if not all of us, have been blessed abundantly! No, it is because of what *others* receive. Like the first workers in the vineyard, if we didn't know what others received, we would have been happy with what we were given and gone home quite content! But the master paid the workers in this order for a reason. Not to teach us something about work, but to teach us something about ourselves, and about Him, and His grace.

So what can we learn about ourselves from this parable? Well, it's not pretty! A parable like this reveals and draws out the sin that lives in each of us. The sin we try so hard to

hide. That we are often dissatisfied with God and how He chooses to distribute His wealth in this world. That we are often jealous of our friends and neighbors, and in competition with them – a competition, but the way, that we want to win! And that even though we know that we should *love God* above all things, it's often the things of this world that we love more than the One who gives these things to us. And so the sin in us turns the goodness of God into something that's not good! And not because He wasn't good to me, or didn't give me enough – no, but simply because somebody else got more.

Well, as I said, its not pretty is it? When we look inside ourselves and see what we're really like . . . deep down, past the good show that we put up for others. And so it's good that we are here today. To repent. To let go of this sin, and ask God not only for forgiveness for it, but also that we might change – and not only be happy (truly happy!) for what others receive; but even more important, that we might love God, and not be angry at Him for giving to others, but be thankful to Him for what He has given me. Because what He has given me, I do not deserve at all!

And that's the key. To not base our relationship with God upon our comparison with others – but to know that all that I have and receive is a gift from God. A gift of His grace. But not in resignation, as if, *Well, God's not fair but there's nothing I can do about it!* No, because you're still comparing yourself then! Instead, think of what we deserve from God. As Luther wrote in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer: *we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment.* (Small Catechism, Explanation to the Fifth Petition) . . . But this is not what God gives. If He were fair, He would! If He were to give us what our work deserved, that would be our wages! **But He doesn't.** He is a master who is gracious and generous, and who loves giving. And so He gives us not only what we need for this body and life, but even more. He gives us not only life, but others to enjoy this life with. He gives us talents and abilities, friends, Church, His angels to watch over and protect us.

But most of all, He gives us His Son. And that's the most amazing thing! All the other things of this world, yeah, maybe God's just taking care of His world. Maybe that's just how things work out. **But God didn't have to give His Son.** He didn't have to send Him into this world to be born as one of us, to take the punishment for our sin, and die on the cross for us. To die in that most humiliating and excruciating way. *But He did! He did!* To not only take care of us in this life, *but for eternal life!* That all the sin and ugliness that lives in us and that would bar us from Heaven, might be forgiven. **And it is, you know!** All of it, paid for and forgiven, through the blood and death of Jesus on the cross. For all our sin and ugliness, Jesus put it on Himself. And if it's on Him, then it's not on you. And if it's not on you, then you are free to go – in this life, and into the next. Free and forgiven, by grace. His gift to you. Free and forgiven, through faith, which

receives that wonderful gift. Free and forgiven, through His Word of absolution, through His body and blood here given to you.

And then you realize, of all those workers in the vineyard, hired in the beginning, and the third and sixth and ninth and eleventh hours – we're the last; hired at the end, working so little, and receiving so much! We are the last who become first, because the Son of God became last for us. That's grace. That's your God, who cannot help giving to you. . . . Do you still want what you deserve from Him? He'll give you that, if that's what you really want. Sadly, many do. But I pray, not you! Receive instead His grace, His gifts, His forgiveness; for His goodness far exceeds not only what we deserve, but is more than we could ever ask or imagine! And don't look around you to see that – just look at yourself, and look at the cross, and give thanks to your Lord and Saviour for His grace and gift.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.