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“We Get What Is Just - What Is Jesus”

Text: Matthew 20:1-16; Isaiah 55:6-9

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

So last week we heard the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, a parable often explained as “*Forgive . . . or else!*” And we thought about the fact that while there’s a little nugget of truth in that, there’s so much more to it. Much more to help us understand ***the kingdom of heaven*** and the new life we have been graciously given *now*.

Well today we have another parable that is often explained in a much too shallow way. This Parable is called *the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard*, but I’ll call it the “*Suck it Up, Buttercup!*” parable! Stop whining! You got what God promised. He didn’t have to give you anything, but He did, graciously. So if He wants to give the same to others and be generous to them, He can do that. So stop complaining.

Just like last week, there’s a nugget of truth in that. It’s not wrong, but it’s not complete. I know I shouldn’t grumble and complain. *But is that it?* No. Just like last week, there’s more. For when we hear Jesus’ parables, they are to teach us Gospel, not Law. To teach us, as this parable starts, what living *now* in ***the kingdom of heaven is like***.

So time to get a little deeper. Take another look and see what more there is here. And to do that, I think it’s the *time stamps* Jesus includes in the parable that can point us in the right direction. This is an all day parable. It starts early in the morning, then continues at the third, then the sixth, then the ninth hours of the day, then the eleventh hour, and then the day is over and the workers get their pay.

That’s pretty precise, pretty exact. *Why?* Of what significance are the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day? Or are they insignificant details that have no meaning at all?

Well, if we think Christologically - which we should, since all the Scriptures are about Jesus, the Christ! If we think Christologically, the ***third hour*** is the hour Jesus was nailed to and lifted up on the cross; the ***sixth hour*** is the midpoint of His crucifixion, when, Matthew tells us, *there was darkness over all the land until the*

ninth hour (Matthew 27:45); and that **ninth hour** is the hour when Jesus died. These are the cardinal hours, *the touchpoint hours*, of Jesus' crucifixion; the hours when Jesus poured out His sweat and blood for us. Which I don't think is a coincidence!

In addition to those time stamps, there are also two other, more general ones: the **early morning**, the start of the day, and the **eleventh hour**, when the day is almost over and there's not much day, or time, left. These, too, are Christological *touchpoint times*, for Scripture tells us that Jesus is *the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end* (Revelation 22:13).

So all of Matthew's time stamps are hours of significance, Christological hours, there to teach us.

But . . . *teach us what?*

Well, first I would say to teach us that the worker in the vineyard, is Jesus. He is the one who - not to earn anything for Himself, but as we confess in the Creed, *who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven* - entered the vineyard, and earned for us - not a denarius, not just *one day's wage* - much more than that! Who earned for us eternal life. All we have, we have because of Him. Because of His grace and mercy and calling us into His life. Because of His work, not ours.

Now that's the foundation for our understanding. But we, too, of course, are called into the vineyard. **To imitate Christ.** So the work we do is the work He has done and the work He now does through us in the new life given to us - the new life of the Spirit. In the parable last week, the focus of that new life was *forgiveness* - forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven us. In the parable today, that scope broadens a bit to include other works we do in this new life, works that we have been given to do and called to do in the vocations we have been graciously given. These are not works we *have* to do, but *get* to do. Works that Christ has *set us free* to do - caring for others, serving others. Because Christ has done all we need, we are now free to do for others. Spouses, families, neighbors, friends, even enemies - *all* people. Just as Jesus came and served all people. Even His enemies.

And, according to this parable, at the end of the day, the end of our lives, we will then receive **whatever is right**. That's an *okay* translation - but just okay. Better is: **whatever is just**. Here's the difference: What is "right," seems to me, is a bit subjective. What is *right* and what is *wrong* in people's minds sometime change over time, and these days, change from person to person! And so the workers who were paid last complained because they thought what the master was doing *wasn't right*. And maybe it wasn't, according to the standards of the day. Or even our standards today. How many times have we ourselves said, *Not fair!*

But what the master gives is **just**. That's a better translation. A less squishy word. It a word akin to *justice*: what is right and wrong that is based on the objective standard of the law.

And here's where Christ comes in . . .

We don't get what is *right*, or fair, from God. If we did, none of us would be here today! Because according to the Law, we are sinners who deserve nothing but punishment and condemnation. The Law that we have broken in our thoughts, words, deeds, and desires. The Law that we have broken by what we do and what we have failed to do. The Law that even on our best days we fail to do.

But because of Jesus, *who for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven* to live and work in the vineyard, in HIS kingdom we get what is **just**. What is HIS. And we do because what He did, He did for us, in our place. He did what we cannot. He kept the Law. He fulfilled it with His perfect life. And then He received what *wasn't* "right," what He did not deserve - His crucifixion from the third through the sixth to the ninth hours. So by doing what we couldn't, and then taking what we deserved, He earned for us the wage to heaven - the forgiveness, life, and salvation we need. And not just for us - He did so for all people of all ages and times - just as in the parable: from the beginning to the end, the alpha to omega. **And what Jesus did . . . that changed the equation**. That's why each worker receives the same wage - because each of us here today, old Christian, young Christian, and Christians of all time, receive the same Jesus, the same gifts, the same forgiveness and life. It's really not about what we do, but what Jesus has done for us.

That we now get to do for others.

And so Jesus calls you into the vineyard, to all different labors. Some long, some short, some hard, some easier. Paul was called to be an apostle and he proclaimed the Word of God far and wide - and suffered greatly for it. Yet you receive the same as he in the kingdom of heaven, who honestly, probably worked far longer and harder than you! Is that fair? No. But it is **just**. It is Jesus. And maybe you can point to others and make the same comparison. And you can complain, like the workers in the vineyard, or you can rejoice like Paul did. And even more, like Jesus did! He *who endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before Him* (Hebrews 12:2) - the joy of *you* and *your salvation*.

This is what ***the kingdom of heaven is like***. It is a kingdom of grace, a kingdom of mercy, a kingdom of life, a kingdom of joy. A kingdom very unlike the world. A kingdom for all people. For you. It is a kingdom of gifts - gifts not primarily of silver

of gold, or denarii or dollars, but of the holy, precious blood of Christ poured out from the cross. His holy precious blood put into water to wash you, into words to forgive you, and into Bread and Wine to feed, nourish, and strengthen you. His holy, precious blood to mark you as one redeemed by Christ, the crucified, and so one who will pass through temporal death to eternal life.

It's not fair - it's better. It's Jesus. It's true what Isaiah said (to paraphrase): *we don't think that way!* But part of this new life we have received from Jesus is (as we learned last week) learning to forgive, and as we hear this week, learning to think differently. To think like Jesus. *Higher thoughts of higher ways of higher things.* That's something St. Paul had to learn as well, that (as we heard today), ***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. To live is Christ*** - to do what we have been given to do in the vineyard, which may be hard! And the ***gain*** comes in the end, when we ***die***. When we rise with Christ and ascend with Christ to glory with Christ. That's not yet, but it will be. It's not of works, but of mercy and grace. It's not fair, but it is just. And *it is yours* in Christ. The first who became the last, that we who are last might be first. That's what ***the kingdom of heaven is like***. And thanks be to God for that!

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.