**Matt 20:1-16 (ESV)**

**1** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. **2** After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. **3** And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, **4** and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ **5** So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. **6** And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ **7** They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ **8** And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ **9** And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. **10** Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. **11** And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, **12** 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.’ **13** But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? **14** Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. **15**  Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ **16** So the last will be first, and the first last.”

**“No Time Like The Present”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Hard work is a trademark of American society. It was there with those first settlers who sailed across the ocean leaving family, jobs, and security. It was there at the time of the industrial revolution changing the shape of how a person would work. It is there still today, since fixing the jobless rate appears to be the primary focus for electing the next president. The saying, “Time is money” is just as relevant as it was when hard work first started out in building America. No matter what the labor God has spoken this truth to all humanity, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground…” (Genesis 3:16).

However, Jesus tells a parable standing in stark contrast to how we value our time or money. God puts His people to work to praise His love that leaves none to be worthless. As we start a new year of Sunday school, it is with thankfulness for those willing to teach. The job of a teacher is hard work. It takes extra time without extra money. God enjoys laborers in His vineyard, but our labor is not a license to lord it over anybody else. Jesus tells today’s parable in view of what Peter said, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Matt 19:27 (ESV) The sinful nature seeks reward only to miss the redeeming work of the Savior. God employs His generosity as a gift to save the greatest and the least.

Before we look at what divided the workers, we must first recognize what united them. All received a call into the vineyard, all would work for a time, and all would have payment. Only the owner could offer such an arrangement. Rather than just hiring workers and walking away, this employer worked more than His workers! God has always dealt with the need to save sinners. It started with this good news spoken to Adam and Eve our first parents. It became evident at the coming of Christ before His disciples. It continues even now, as God graciously invites us to repent and believe in the Gospel. As Isaiah the prophet declares, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Whether early in the morning, mid-day, afternoon, or the eleventh hour, the Lord of the Church is working to make the useless useful. Unlike an earthly employer, He is not in it for the money. It is to save people even if it is at His own expense. This promising Word of love still comes with forgiveness and life for sinners. Baptism binds us together as workers in God’s vineyard. He has already arranged our salvation to be in Christ. This is the generosity that St. Paul recognized upon His life declaring, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Once a useless enemy of the Gospel, now Paul the apostle praises God’s grace that truly saved sinners even while he sat in prison. The glory belongs to Jesus for seeking the lost is what His Word does so that all might have faith in Him.

Of course, the discrepancy in the parable arises at the end of the day. Those who worked the least and were the last had no claims to make. There was no reason to boast. It was self-evident they did not deserve much let alone any praise. Yet, the owner gave them the honor of being first and the same payment as all the rest. What grace, what love, what sacrifice made by the owner. It was His loss, but their gain. In reaction to such compassion, the first workers expected more. When they did not get what they thought was coming to them, they turned on the owner. The charge was simple, “You have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” Their time was money nothing more and certainly nothing less. Luther declares about this parable, “…They served not for the sake of mercy but for the sake of reward. And they will receive that and nothing more…”[[1]](#footnote-1) The judgment rendered by the owner was to give them payment, but rather than sending them back into the vineyard. He sent them away. He fired them.

Whether it is the blessing to be born and raised Christian or just the sacrifices made over the years for Christ and His Church. The longer we have benefited from working in the vineyard. The easier it becomes to compare ourselves with others. All of it attacks salvation in Jesus who is for the greatest and the least. Rather than a privilege to sit in a pew, we can turn it into my right. No longer is it about gift, but really about my own glory. Faith bearing the cross throughout life looks to Jesus saying with St. Paul, “What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.” There really are no claims to make. Compared to the first apostles we truly are the last. They knew what hard work truly was in terms of being a Christian. Yet, God still generously calls us today from our idleness of sin and death to work only a short time at this eleventh hour. There is really no time like the present. It comes with this promise, “Whatever is right I will give you.” The surprise is that it is nothing less than the same true body and blood of Christ shed for sinners present in the sacrament.

Before any would work in the vineyard, Jesus built this kingdom of God upon His sacrifice. Before any would hear the Gospel call, the Father called His Son to die on the cross. Before any would receive payment, Jesus paid the price to make His righteousness a promise for all to believe. The parable extends over a full workday, not 9-5, but from sunrise to sunset. Jesus worked the entire day. The greatest became the least. The first was made last. From the crack of dawn in dealing with Pontius Pilot to the heat of judgment on the cross during mid-day to finally His rest in the tomb before evening. The whole workday comes with the covering of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. He won all things for our salvation so fear turns to faithfulness to work for Him. God employs His generosity as a gift to save the greatest and the least. The first see how the love of Jesus abounds for the last. The last see why any worked at all for Jesus is first and last Savior. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. Luther’s church postils 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)