

Sermon Matthew 20 1 16 14<sup>th</sup> S af Pent

Sermon: 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 20:1-16 – The parable of the workers in the vineyard

Theme: God's generosity.

Goal: God is generous to all. It's a privilege to work in His vineyard!

Dear Friends,

**Introduction:** Cape Town is famous for its numerous vineyards and the good wine it produces. We went for a two-hour drive on N1 two weeks ago. It is amazing to see the several vast vineyards, and people working on them just now before spring, so that they would have a good harvest in summer.

I don't know the work system in the local vineyards, if the workers are permanent employees; or if they are employed on a seasonal basis, just for some months... In Jesus' time the landowner used to hire day-laborers, paying them per day. The standard daily wage for a laborer was one denarius, - the same as for a Roman soldier.

Maybe the workforce of the first ones hired by the landowner in the Parable, very early in the morning (around 6:00 am), would have been enough for that day. But he decided to go back to the market place at 9:00 am, at noon, at 3:00 pm and again at 5:00 pm ( I converted the time according to our count, not according the Jews count). And the landowner always hired some more people, - maybe just to give them a chance to earn some money that day. They were happy that they found some job for the day; but obviously they were not expecting to receive the daily wage in full, like the others who had worked all the day. But the owner was generous to them and gave them the same amount as for all, knowing that they needed some money to give something to eat to their families that day.

This parable is not a rule for business men. If you, as a business man, will act this way, you will have to deal with the Labors Union and all the employees' rights. God operates differently from labor and

management. Jesus is talking about what “the kingdom of heaven is like to...”

### **I – The Scribes and Pharisees were envious...**

*“When Jesus first spoke this parable, the grumbling of the first workers was a reference to the grumbling of the scribes and the Pharisees over the graciousness of Christ toward publicans and sinners. The Jewish leaders had not been wronged; they were jealous (had an evil eye) that others had been treated generously. These others (tax collectors and sinners), who were considered last, were nevertheless the first to receive God's gracious offer, while those considered first (Pharisees and scribes) were the last to receive it, if they received it at all (Matt.20:16)”. (Series A, p. 209)*

The people of Israel were the very first ones to be called to work in God's vineyard. We have that illustration several times in the Old Testament: God is the landowner and the people are God's vineyard. The leaders should have taken care of God's people. (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jer 12:10).

Now, Jesus comes and invites all to come to His Kingdom, and promises the Kingdom of Heaven even to the so called “big sinners”: tax collectors and prostitutes. The Pharisees couldn't understand this and they criticized Jesus. They became envious when they saw Jesus calling those people to repentance and promising them God's Kingdom and God's love. The Pharisees were called first; *“they assumed that they deserved more”*(ABC 1152); how can the others, who were called later, receive the same? - And just to mention: A thief was called in the last hour of his life and was the first one to enter the Kingdom of Heaven after Jesus: The robber that was hung on the cross next to Jesus. Jesus promised him: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

*“The point of the parable is that as the owner dealt very generously with all workers, so God is generous beyond our understanding”* (Series A p. 209).

## II - Peter is curious about his reward...

Jesus directed this parable not just to the Pharisees, but to His disciples as well. Just some verses before our text, after the rich young man decided not to follow Jesus because he didn't want to leave all his richness, Peter asked Jesus: “We have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?” (19:27). Will we receive a special reward? Will our payment be bigger than that of the others?

Jesus promised him the eternal life and some blessings on this earth as well, but not without tribulations. And Jesus finished his words to Peter saying: “But many who are the first will be the last, and many who are the last will be the first” (19:30). And then Jesus tells this parable, finishing it with the same words: “So the last will be the first and the first will be the last”. This frames the parable.

*“How often do we think of earning or deserving God's grace? Many become discouraged and leave when they do not seem to be rewarded for their efforts, devotion, and loyalty”* (Series A p. 123). To work in the kingdom of God is not a matter of “deserving”. It's a matter of God's grace, which calls us out of love from darkness and condemnation, and forgives our sins for the sake of Christ, giving us the new life and a position in His Kingdom. We know that we deserve nothing good as sinners that we are. “For the wage of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

*“We see God's value system in this parable... The merit system is used in this world. But in God's kingdom there is the principle of grace alone... The Lord deals with us by grace, compassion and kindness. His grace is His favor toward us, an unmerited love and favor, an undeserved feeling of kindness toward us because of Christ... The last hired had worked so little compared to the first. Their pay was a free gift. They had not earned it or merited it. They had nothing to deserve it.”* (LCMS A pp.123,122).

### III – What about us?

When were you called to be a worker in God's kingdom? Maybe in the first hour of your life, when you were baptized as a child? This is my case. Did we deserve that call? NO! God came and called us out of love. We are working in His Kingdom all our lives, and “we have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day”. Shall we complain about it? NEVER! We thank God everyday for the grace to be a worker in His vineyard and we ask for forgiveness for doing only our duty and nothing more, as Jesus said in Luke 17:10: “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty'”. - It's by God's grace that we stand firm as workers in His vineyard. We cannot boast on or be unhappy with the blessings He pours out on us. If we grumble, it *“reveals our loveless and unmerciful attitude and shows that we are under the Law instead of under grace more that we perhaps realize... Just to be a Christian is a privilege – not a wearisome duty but a happy service, no matter how long God lets us serve”* (Series A 210).

When were you called to be a worker in God's kingdom? Maybe in the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour of your life, or in the 6<sup>th</sup>, or in the 9<sup>th</sup>, or maybe just recently! It doesn't matter when you were called. What is important is that you were called by God's grace and you are a worker in His vineyard. Don't be lazy. But try to do your best. - This refers to all of us!

**Conclusion:** When Martin Luther wrote about the blessings we receive from God (we can talk about the wage God gives us, according to this parable), he wrote: *“All this God does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.”* (1<sup>st</sup>. Article of the Apostle Creed). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle - Cape Town, 18 September 2011