

Sermon Matthew 20 1 16 6<sup>th</sup> S af Epiphany 1Year S Septuagesima

Sermon: 6th Sunday after Epiphany – Septuagesima

Text: Matthew 20:1-16 – The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Theme: The privilege of working in God's vineyard

Goal: That God's people will rejoice in God's grace and will serve at every opportunity to work in God's Kingdom, not grumbling or doing it as a "must" or expecting a reward.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Two Sundays ago we compared the church to a boat: We are all together with Jesus in a boat, facing sometimes strong storms and wind, but once we will reach the harbor, because Jesus is with us.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus compares His Kingdom, the church, to a vineyard. This is a well-known image for all of us, who live surrounded by vineyards here in Cape Town. I know that some of our members are working in vine estates, but not straight with the cultivation of grapes, but in administration of the estate. There is a lot of work to do, especially when it's time to prune and clean the vineyard, and then again when it's harvest time.

God is the owner of the vineyard, and we are the workers.

I – God calls us

Some of us were called into God's vineyard in the early hours of our lives: When we were baptized as little children. Some are called in later hours of their lives. And some are even called in the last minute, like the one criminal hanging on the cross beside Jesus.

Is it our merit that God called us? Are some more "worthy" to be called than others? NO! We were unemployed, sitting on the market place, and He came and gave us a chance to enter his Kingdom and to work in His vineyard.

Of course, we are very different from each other and we have many different skills, positions, responsibilities and opportunities. Not all can be a politician, or be in charge of a big company.

*Luther: In Christ's kingdom, however – be it king, prince, lord, servant, wife, maid, or whatever – all of them are equal! None has a different baptism, gospel, faith, sacrament, or a different Christ and God. Together they all go to church; servant, townsman, farmer, all hear the same Word as the lord, prince, and nobleman hear. The baptism I have is the same one that any little maid receives; the faith Peter and Paul had is the same faith Magdalene and the thief on the cross had; as Christians you and I also have it. (Phil Brandt, p. 35). Jesus has given the same love, forgiveness, and even heaven itself to prince and pauper, CEO and janitor. And there is a place in our lives in which we operate out of that reality. The wealthy sinner gets no pass nor does the poor man when it comes to sin... Jesus has died for both, loves both, forgives both, and the Christian gets to say and act that WAY. (Phil Brandt pp. 41,42).*

This is GRACE, as Luther highlighted it so well in the reformation he led. We are not worthy. God calls us to His kingdom, and we are saved and protected into His vineyard by GRACE alone.

II – The opportunities to serve are various  
There is a lot of work to do in God's Kingdom. Some kind of responsibility is given to each of us; to some more than one task. Some work all their life, from morning to evening; some work just for a while.

What motivates us to work in God's kingdom? Is it the payment at the end of the day? Are we looking for a reward? Are we working just obligated, as a "must"? Or are we lazy, doing nothing in God's vineyard?

If some of these thoughts are driving us to work in God's Kingdom, something is wrong with us and we don't really grasp our role in God's Kingdom. We have to rethink our position.

It is a unique opportunity that God gives to someone when we are called to work in His vineyard. It doesn't matter at what time of our life we are called, neither what kind of challenges God gives us: To be a pastor, and Elder, to prepare coffee and tea, to give a lift to someone, to be the organist, to clean the garden, to visit some elderly and sick people, to give to the poor... There are so many opportunities to serve and so much work to do, that seldom we have some leave. What really matters is that we were called by God's grace to be His workers, that we are inside His Kingdom, and that we are loved by God – regardless of who we are. It's by GRACE that we are here!

If we grumble against God, like the Israelites did in the wilderness, in spite of being recently delivered from the harsh slavery they suffered in Egypt; if we grumble against God's blessings; why someone has more than me; or why I need to suffer this and that; while some non-church goers have prosperity and health; if we grumble against some responsibility that are given to us, - we have to examine our relationship with God. It seems that we are concerned only about ourselves, and that we don't value the GRACE of God in our life and the other workers.

*When Jesus opens a door for me to serve, I can jump in there with joy (p. 54). I don't ever have to wonder if someone has done more or if I have done enough... This is a true and Christian joy, the sort of Joy that not even prison could take away from the apostle Paul. He could serve God there too. He could look out through the bars and see the Gospel preached and, though he longed to be out there doing it too, he could rejoice because Christ was preached.*

*It wasn't about Paul anymore, it was about Jesus, and that made him glad. (p. 55).*

III – The reward is the same

And what about the payment? Those workers who had “borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day” grumbled against the owner that they received the same that those who had worked only for one hour. - If you are working in God's kingdom looking for a reward, as it depends on your efforts and deeds, forget it. This is not the criteria of God's Kingdom.

Of course, a Capetonian vineyard business would collapse soon if we applied the principles of this parable to today's reality.

Someone who works eight hours receives the same that one who works only one hour? Never! – Jesus is not giving business rules. He just wants to teach us that in His Kingdom everything is a matter of GRACE, and not a matter of compensation and payment. For us, it is a privilege to be called to work and to serve in God's Kingdom by faith in Jesus. Even if we don't see nor enjoy the rewards here while we are working, once we will experience it in God's presence in heaven. And there, we will be seated side by side at the big banquet table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the criminal who died with Jesus on a cross, with Lazarus - the poor leper, and with thousands of other workers that were called by God's grace to faith in Jesus and to work in His Kingdom. Strictly speaking, it is not reasonable for our understanding. But this is God's grace. We just rely on it.

*Conclusion: I am not earning something. I have already been given everything. The love of God dwelling in us actually moves us to far more than any buy/sell motivation. (p. 57). For the one who believes, the kingdom really needs no explanation, for the one who does not believe, there is no explaining this. (p.47). Amen.*