



Free Evangelical  
Lutheran Synod  
in South Africa

## Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday of Pentecost 2017

*God promises that He will give what is  
right!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish  
Shelly Beach

### • The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 20,1-16:

• <sup>1</sup>"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.

• <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

• <sup>3</sup> And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.'

• <sup>5</sup> So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

• <sup>6</sup> And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said (*speaks*) to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup> They said (*say*) to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said (*says*) to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

• <sup>8</sup> And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.'

• <sup>9</sup> And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

• <sup>10</sup> Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, <sup>12</sup> 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.'

• <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?'

• <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last."

• Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will see what You see and drink from the spring of water which gives Life. Amen.*

### • **Dear Beloved of God!**

• Earlier on Peter, the spokesperson of the disciples, speaking for us too, had asked [19,27]: "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" We recognise this attitude. What's in it for me? Why must I suffer and work such long

hours, whilst the others, well, they are not even here? We might never say it openly. But, this parable poses a huge problem for our comparative nature- we like to compare ourselves with others. We are constantly comparing ourselves with all others around us! We don't even notice it. It comes so natural to us. It is very difficult to do something without expecting the slightest reward.

- It is completely unnatural not to do it. With comparison comes the judgement whether we have been treated fair or not. And this is especially true for the working environment, for the environment of the school and at home. But what about the new creation of God, His church?

- Once again, Jesus reveals to us, that the kingdom of heaven is like non other vineyard. There is also work to be done. But the kingdom of heaven operates differently. In fact, it is radically different, especially if we consider what the implications are in practice. Here is why:

- The earliest labourers were hired and sent into the vineyard with the agreement that they would get one denarius at the end of the day. Then the master of the house hired some more workers at 3, 6 and 9 hours later telling them: I will give you what is right! And then he went and even hired some more at the eleventh hour, with only one hour of work left. But, notice, He did not promise these any reward. He just told them, 'you go into the vineyard too'!

- Then came the end of the day of labour and time for handing out the wages. It is here that the first workers, those who had worked the longest, experienced one shock after another. The first one: He told his foreman to pay those who worked the shortest time *first!* The next shock followed straight away: They also got one denarius! They are paid first although they started very, very late. Furthermore, they received the full payment as if they had worked the whole day! By the time the foreman came to those he hired first, they had already made up their own assumptions, their own calculations of how much more they would get, because they had worked much longer!

- Do you see what assumption they worked on? The longer I work the more I get paid. The more work will give a greater reward.

- And then came the final shock for them: When they got their pay, it was one denarius, as the foreman had agreed with them! The same as those who only worked for one hour! This is when they started to grumble, we would say, toi-toi! This is not fair. How can you make us equal to them, although we have toiled very much longer?

- So, what is Jesus teaching His disciples? First of all, that although they, the Twelve, are the foundation phase, on whom the church of Christ is built up, this does not mean, that they will get a greater reward than those who would be baptised into the fold of Jesus in the last hour! The reward is the same for all workers. God will give us what is

right, namely: eternal Life. This irrespective of how much or how long we worked!

• In other words, Jesus teaches His disciples not to work because they want a reward. He wants them to work, like the last ones did- He sent them without mentioning any reward and they nevertheless went and worked in God's vineyard. So, their reward came as a pleasant surprise.

• Work in the kingdom should be driven by a thankful heart and mind. How does one get such a heart? By receiving the Word of Grace, by being reminded of what toil Jesus has done for our sakes! And so, work in God's vineyard, and that is the world, God's creation, should be seen as our vocation! We are called, by Grace, to give our life as a service for our neighbour. In word and deed. We are called to with our bodies and minds serve one another according to our God given abilities. And in this regard there is much diversity. We are not all the same. Living out our vocations are going to be different. That is beneficial for the community!

• And here it is important to realise that any service done to our neighbour without expecting any reward, without expecting anything back, is doing it for God.

• So, as Christians, we strive to serve others with the gifts we have received from God. We use the gifts God has given us for the benefit of others and He will give what is right!! He will take care of you.

• This is totally in contrast with the attitude: What's in it for me? If we stare at the reward, even if we get what is right we won't be happy! We will grumble, because its so unfair, they haven't worked as hard as we did. We deserve more!

• The truth is, we don't deserve anything, because we are the poor in the spirit who are blessed by God out of the fountain of His goodness. His goodness is concrete, is the center of history, is so solid, a cross was rammed into the ground, was planted into the center of planet earth and God's own Son worked salvation for us dying naked and cursed, forsaken by His loving Father. And all for us, for you!

• That is why we are alive! That is why we can work. What a privilege to be called by God, to have a vocation, a place in His kingdom to serve others. What a privilege to participate in a local congregation! What a privilege to submit oneself to one's neighbours! What an honour to serve others and to point them towards the foundation of God's goodness. Yes, serving others is work, is difficult, is tiresome, mostly seems to be without any avail, but our reward is with us. He helps us. He facilitates times in which we can come to Him for rest, for renewed strength, for a renewed spirit, a cleansed conscience, ready to serve a hostile world, which is passing away in every aspect of its existence.

• And what a relief it is, what a beautiful attitude it is, to work without having to worry about a reward! What a huge advantage we as Christians have to know that our Father

in Heaven gives us what is right. We can concentrate fully on serving others. Of course, the thorns and thistles will be many in this selfish world. All the more will it be of advantage to those we are serving to focus on overcoming the thorns and thistles tucked into our path instead of wasting energy on comparing what we do with others! In fact, we should look what others are doing and see if we can't help, if it is not possible to work together, to team up, if they are going in the same direction!

• And if others are noticed in the newspapers, whilst nobody reports anything about us, let us rejoice with them, if what they did was going in the direction God wants us to go.

• Dear congregation, do you notice, we are not speaking of doing so-called supernatural things, we are not speaking here of winning the world, or fleeing the world, we are speaking of normal everyday tasks done with a new attitude, a truly new spirit, a new soul which realises that we have our reward already with us. Jesus is present with the Grace of God!! Is there anything more we need?

• And can you see, that this new spirit drives out envy, competition, strife, selfishness etc. we can go through all ten commandments! And where this spirit takes hold of a congregation, of a church, it will be a blessing for its community. It is true, true joy comes from serving others with purity of conscience.

• And we know well where the pure heart comes from. That is something God gives to us, as often as we ask Him. It is something God loves to give, because He has provided well for this most important gift. Our hearts are purified by the reward Christ Jesus received for His work on the Cross. He shares the reward He was worthy to receive with us, who are not worthy to life. He has become our brother. He shares His Father with us. He shares His forgiveness with us, His holiness, His mind and attitude.

• It is when we forget about the Cross and resurrection of Jesus, that all of a sudden Grace can seem unfair. And that is why its so necessary that we are always reminded of it, that our mind is rewired, that new connections in our mind are formed which makes us think cruciform, which shapes our mind, which grounds our mind to this central reality which is absolutely vital for Life and joy in our existence, but also for the existence of others around me. Therefore, Jesus speaks to us today, in the eleventh hour, its not too late (*these words stick out because they are in the present tense*) [7]: “*You also go into the vineyard*”. Amen.

• *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13, 14).*