

# SEPTUAGESIMA

February 17 2019 / D.M. Kerns

Exodus 17:1-17

I Corinthians 9:24-10:5

Matthew 20:1-16

## ***Standing...***

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Beloved, if you can grasp what our Lord says in this parable,  
not only will you know the overall thrust of your Bible,  
but you will understand the grace of God.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

## ***Sitting...***

The kingdom of heaven is the holy Christian Church on earth.

When you confess—as you just did—that you believe in the holy Christian church—  
you are confessing that you have been swept up by the kingdom of heaven  
and you're in it.

For the kingdom of heaven is wherever Jesus is—  
with His Word and Sacrament.

And here's what we must keep in mind,

the kingdom of heaven does not operate according of our fallen human reason—  
to the way we expect or anticipate...

Rather it operates on a completely different set of rules.

See, we think the kingdom of heaven should operate on fairness,  
on earning and on people getting what they deserve,  
but the kingdom of heaven does not do that.

Though that may be fine elsewhere,

Jesus does not deal with us on the basis of fairness—  
He deals with us on the basis of favor.

Jesus does not deal with us on the basis of merit—

Jesus deals with us on the basis of mercy.

This is what we call grace...and to demonstrate this,  
Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a vineyard, with a landowner and workers.

The workers are called early in the morning—just as the sun is coming up and a full day lie ahead. These workers agree to bear the burden of a full day's work, enduring the heat, yet they will be duly compensated. They agree to work for one denarius—an entire day's wage. Satisfied, they're sent off into the vineyard.

But then, the landowner goes back to the market place three hours later and hires some more—those who take a little bit longer to get going in the morning—those who like to sleep in a little bit and drink a second cup of coffee while they read the paper. They enjoy taking their time, but once they make it to the marketplace, they're hired and sent into the vineyard.

Three hours later though it's lunch time—and sure enough there are some who are just getting started—they must be college students—but they want to work too, and the landowner hires them.

Surprisingly, the same thing happens early afternoon, at 3...

And wouldn't you know it, at 5 o'clock guess who gets hired? Some real winners—I mean, some real losers—with a capital L. They have wasted the entire day, and don't seem to be bothered by it at all. Once they get to the marketplace, all they do is loiter around. Yet, surprisingly, the landowner hires them and ships them out to the vineyard to pick grapes—for one hour—for one measly little hour—hardly even breaking a sweat.

When it's time to knock off, the whistle blows and everyone lines up to be paid. The late comers get in line first and those who've worked all day fall in at the back.

They are the ones who worked 12 hours—all day long.

The guys in the front only worked one.

But can you believe it?

One denarius is flipped in their direction.

You've got to be kidding?

An entire day's wage for one hour? This is incredible!

Word would have shot through the line that the terms of the contract have changed—

If one hour is equal to one denarius, then 12 hours...(carry the one)

My goodness!

What a payday!

But the men who worked three hours get up to the table and each receive one denarius. This is still extremely generous, but then the guys who worked six hours get one denarius as well. The guys who worked nine hours get the same—and the ones who were up and at ‘em at the crack o’ dawn—only one denarius is given to them.

One—just like all the others.

Those workers do exactly what you would do.

“How dare the landowner do this—

We worked longer—

We worked harder—

We had seniority—

They are outraged at the grace the landowner shows to the last.

You know, you could say God went out real early in the morning, looking for workers to place in His precious vineyard, to tend His beloved Church.

You even know some of their names—

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David...

There are plenty of others, but out of all the other nations on earth, the Israelites were to be His special people.

As a nation, they celebrated the Passover.

They came out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea.

As Paul wrote in today’s Epistle,

“All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

The point is, the Israelites started out trusting God, believing they deserved nothing from Him, and knowing Him to be good, kind and full of mercy.

But faith turned into unbelief. And what did the landowner do?

He did what He always does...He went looking for more workers—more workers to bring into His vineyard, even a few Gentiles, here and there—doing this throughout the OT. Why? Because He wants all to come into His vineyard—all to come into His kingdom, all to experience His outrageous generosity.

You fast forward to the opening of the NT, and what do we find Jesus doing?

Mercifully receiving sinners,  
sitting at table with tax collectors,  
talking to prostitutes,  
touching lepers,  
associating with Gentiles...

All these people who are nothing but real losers with a capital L.  
These people hadn't worked very long or hard  
at keeping the Law of Moses.  
Yet they are being brought to repentance.  
Jesus would say to them, "Take heart. Your sins are forgiven."  
And just like that,  
they receive the same prize of God's favor and eternal life.

The workers hired at the outset—thinking they kept all of God's laws perfectly,  
should have rejoiced in the mercy of God.

They should have loved their fellow man—  
been glad to be fellow recipients of the generosity of God.  
Instead, it was just the opposite...  
Equal status in God's kingdom? For them?! No way!

It's not unlike when our Lord is being crucified...

As one criminal heaps abuses upon Jesus, what does the other criminal say?

"Stop it!"

"We're getting what we deserve."

"This Man has done nothing wrong."

Then he says to Jesus,

"Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

This loser has spent his entire life sinning,  
and after finally getting caught he's now  
being executed for his crimes.

What does He deserve?

Hell—

just as I do...

just as you do...

But what does Jesus say to him? "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

Did the criminal earn this? Not at all—

And with that, Jesus makes the thief on the cross equal even to the apostles.

To those who despise the grace of the landowner  
 and complain about His generosity,  
 who look at Jesus with an evil eye,  
 He says, "Take what is yours and go your way."  
 The kingdom of heaven, the favor of the landowner  
 are no longer accessible.

But gratefully, both are accessible to you.  
 You are in the kingdom of heaven right now—  
 for the landowner—Jesus—He found you,  
 out loitering around in the Devil's kingdom,  
 and called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

He then baptized you—  
 which wasn't a work you did showing everyone else you're saved,  
 as the American Evangelical believes.  
 Your baptism was His work, forgiving you all of your sins.  
 This gift is exactly what He did for the person sitting next to you.  
 It was the same baptism given to Martin Luther,  
 St. Augustine and that which was given to St. Paul.

Furthermore, He gives everyone the same favor,  
 the same forgiveness, the same salvation, the same eternal life.  
 You have the same righteousness, the same promises, the same Name of God  
 placed upon you—whether it's placed on you in the Divine Service or you place it  
 on you yourself. Your prayers are equally heard, and you will be equally rewarded  
 on the Last Day with a new heaven, a new earth and a new body.

This landowner delights to give what's undeserved to everyone...  
 He is not fair, but He is generous and He is good.

Jesus then concludes the parable saying,  
 "Many are called—and there are many who are called—but few are chosen."  
 Few remain all the way to quittin' time.  
 Yet what does the generous landowner give to strengthen His workers?  
 His Word...  
 His absolution...  
 His Body and His Blood...  
 All of which make weak hands strong.  
 Giving you a clean heart and renew a right spirit within you.

In the Holy Name of Jesus.

***Standing...***

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.