

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Gospel reading today, God warns and rebukes you, he teaches you, and he comforts you. He does all these things in the parable you heard spoken by your Lord Jesus. He calls you, then, to have ears to hear and listen closely to what he says and take all this to heart as his people.

From the get-go, it matters who God is and how he operates in his Kingdom. The Lord teaches this clearly. Jesus began by saying, “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.” To know and trust God goes along with how he works. With that, Jesus compares God’s kingdom, his rule and reign, to a master who owns a vineyard. The vineyard is a common image in the Gospels of the church and in the Old Testament as well for God’s people.

What follows in the parable, after Jesus has established he is talking about God and his kingdom, is his work. “After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. 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?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’”

You see God operate in calling his people. You see him place his people into the vineyard. You see him call them to tend and work in his vineyard even as Adam in Genesis before the fall was called to tend and work the garden. You see there is beauty in all of this to be God’s people and work as you have been assigned in the church, your family, and the world. Work as a Christian is good and not to be shunned but extoled and encouraged. God teaches you this and you are to follow his instruction. Article IV of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord on Good works rightly confesses, “In believers good works are signs of salvation when they are done from true causes and for true ends. That is, in the sense in which God requires them of the regenerate (Philippians 1:20). It is God’s will and clear command that believers should do good works. The Holy Spirit works this in believers, and God is pleased with good works for Christ’s sake. He promises a glorious reward for good works in this life and the life to come.”

The first warning and rebuke is for you as Christians to not neglect what God has given you to do. Look at the Commandments and look at where God has placed and called you in this life. Do not be apathetic or lazy as a Christian in your vocations for this is sinful to do so. This is why you are to crucify the old man and set your minds on the things of God. In the Epistle reading, God through St. Paul writes, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

Be steadfast in putting your head to the plow, whatever that may mean, and finding contentment where God has called you. Good works are a fruit of your faith. They are good and God finds delight in them as so does your neighbor. This is who you are God’s new creation in Christ, a new man living in faith toward God and in love toward your neighbor. You too, will find and have joy in living according to God’s word and walking according to his way. It’s the path of life and the way that looks at the world differently and in a spirit of sacrifice for your neighbor loving him and serving your Lord. It’s a life lived in the Kingdom of God that serves and does as one has been called to do.

The parable goes on as Jesus said, “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.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, 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.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a

denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

When the day’s work is done, day laborers receive their wages. Yet some are upset but why? Do they look at what was given them and say, “wait what’s FICA?” No, the ones who were hired first are upset they received the same as those who only worked an hour before the day’s work was done. They are upset at the master. Why does the master do this? He told them, did you catch it? He told them they would receive a denarius and later he said, “whatever is right I will give you.” The master gives to them not only what he promised them but what is right and just. The first one’s hired are offended because they think they deserve more or rather they think they are entitled to more.

This second warning here is also for you. Jesus shows you how you are to be toward your neighbor especially in the household of faith and it’s twofold. It’s tempting to want to have the same heart and mind as those first workers. Think about how you have been in the church your whole life, baptized as an infant, and have endured times of hardship, sacrifice, hard work in the church and in your lives for the sake of Christ and then those who maybe have rejected the faith their whole lives and then on their deathbeds confess their sin, the Holy Spirit works faith through his word, their sin is forgiven, they are baptized, and they are received into the eternal kingdom of God. Not once did they miss something else to go to church on Sunday. Not once did they miss meals or time in the evening because they had a meeting at church. Not once did they face ridicule and insults for standing up for God’s word and lost the love of family members and friends in the process. No, now, in the last hour they have been called into the vineyard.

Think also about when your neighbor receives something good or perhaps even better than you. Are you to begrudge him? Are you to try and see that you are not “left out” or that you can somehow have the final say and final commendation? Coveting what doesn’t belong to you is sinful. Looking down on your neighbor is sinful. Repent of those things. What is to be your response and heart, then, toward this person? Romans 12 teaches you, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.”

When your neighbor receives what is good you are to rejoice. When someone is brought at the Kingdom of God before his last breath in this world, you are to get down on your knees and give thanks that this has happened. Why? Because in this you see and fix your eyes on the whole point of what Jesus is teaching you today in this parable and this is where you find great comfort. Everything comes back to the master. The master of the vineyard is gracious and merciful. That means everything for all the laborers in the vineyard and that means everything for you. His generosity is your salvation.

The master gives what is just and right. Whatever is just and right. Here’s the thing, why is this just and right? It’s out of his grace, mercy, and generosity? Why is that? This word and its related ones are ripe throughout the Gospels and the New Testament as a whole. There is one who is just and right, and God counts his work to you and for you. The master gave them what is right and just, and God’s does the same for you. He gives to you out of his grace on account of Christ. God is righteous and Jesus Christ is the righteous one.

The Collect of the day, you prayed a few minutes ago, puts it this way, “O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of Your people that we who justly suffer the consequence of our sin may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness to the glory of Your name.” Your plea is that your Lord would treat you just like the master of this parable. You pray and cry out in this way because you know exactly how your Lord will indeed treat you and look at you. The workers had been promised what their wages would be, and God has made promises to you. You know what is due you and what you will receive on the Last Day and when you stand before you Lord. He’s already told you and given it to you. You are baptized into Christ. Your sin is forgiven. You take into your mouths the very true and real body and blood of Jesus.

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You see dear people of God there is one who has done the work that pays for you salvation and it is finished. Jesus has done the full work of the day. He has endured the scorching heat. He has faithfully done it all completely and obediently as on he can do. His righteous life and atoning death are now counted to you by the Father as his glorious resurrection proclaims this to you this very day. This is just and right.

And that brings you back, then, to the parable. The generosity of the master is great, and thanks be to God for that wonderful mercy found in Christ. Don't lose sight of the master and his generosity. He who called you is faithful. The days may be long at times and the work may be hard, but you know the promise of the master and it's good and righteous what he has promised. You know the one who did the work you cannot do and has the paid the price you owe but cannot fully pay. You know Christ and his promises look toward the end of the day when no one can work any longer. You look forward to that day when you stand before the Lord and with your calloused hands and the sweat dripping down from your brows the Lord only sees the crucified hands of the Son and blood dripping from his thorn pierced head. You find your confidence solely and completely in him and know he has promised you will see the day of glory where our joy is complete and because of Christ, the Lord will say, "well done good and faithful servant" and you will reply, "I have only done what is my duty."

And on that day too you will look around and see those who may have only been working for a short time, perhaps only a few hours or moments, but you will share in their joy. You will see those who have sinned against you and God worked repentance. The martyrs of the faith will stand shoulder to shoulder with some of those same people who brought about their earthly end and God graciously converted them. And you, you will all stand together around the throne of the Lamb washed clean in his blood and you will sing his praises for he has done marvelous things not just for you but for those who are in your company as his saints. There will be no evil eye that day but eyes which see the Lord and behold him as he has graciously saved you by his blood. The joy will be a shared joy even as the Lord has shared his great and glorious work for your redemption and gives it to you freely. The work in the vineyard will be over and the fruits will be consumed as the choice wine which overflows at that great feast. And that is no generosity to begrudge but a generosity that knows no end and enlivens your hearts with a joy which springs from this salvation which has come unto you by God's good grace and favor in Christ alone.

There's great comfort in this parable for you today dear people of God because it means that God is true to what he says, and he is generous toward you in Christ. God promises you what is yours and it all depends on what Jesus has done. True, there will be those who don't receive the denarius at the end of the day, this parable, however, doesn't address that here but next week you will hear about that. The point here, though, today in this reading from Matthew, is that all received the same because God is good. God's grace is a wonderful thing indeed. The favor of God is toward you because of Jesus and his work done on your behalf. God's face looks and shines upon you because your sin has been atoned for by Jesus and you are baptized into his name. This life is lived under the cross and sometimes the work is backbreaking. Sometimes it looks as though the day will never end and that promised denarius will never be seen. But the day will end, and the night will come when no one will be able to work. On that day, though, you will rest with Jesus and all his saints reaping the fruit of Christ's labor for you. You will sit and drink the fine wine of salvation which overflows at the eternal wedding feast. God is gracious and merciful, amen, thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.