

Septuagesima 2025  
Matt. 20:1-16 (ESV)

The master of the house said, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?  
Or is your eye evil because I am good?”

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

The Lord’s blessings to all of you, dear ones. Today is Septuagesima, and for our catechumens and new converts, for those of you who may have forgotten or are otherwise unfamiliar with this term, it means we’re now about 70 days away from Easter Sunday.

Today we begin the pre-Lent season. It’s a short liturgical season lasting only a couple of weeks, and it’s a time for us to make ready for the season of Lent itself—for that special forty-day period of heightened devotion to our Lord culminating in Holy Week.

And as we set out to make the liturgical journey to the cross on Good Friday and to the empty tomb on Easter morning, we strive to do so with more prayer and fasting, than usual. We strive to do so spending more time than usual meditating on the holy Scriptures and on all that our most blessed Lord Jesus did for us unworthy sinners, to redeem us, and show mercy to us, and lavish us with the riches of His divine grace.

So how fitting it is, then, for us to begin making ready for the journey ahead by fixating on His grace, looking at what it is and what it’s like in action.

This is our focus today: the unmerited kindness and favor of God given us in Jesus Christ. And it’s what we see in our Master’s parable of the workers in the vineyard.

“The kingdom of heaven,” our Lord says, “is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”

And, dear ones, right here already we should see just how extraordinary this is. In our Lord’s parable, none other than the master of the house personally takes it upon himself to go to the market to find laborers. This would be like seeing a well-known, well-respected CEO of a thriving company personally going down to a local job fair.

Can you imagine the kind of interest that would stir up?

The master of the house in the parable doesn’t send his foreman; it’s not some assistant, or manager who goes—no, the master himself is the one who searches and finds men hoping, in the end, for steady work, but who, if nothing else, just need a decent job for the day to provide for their families back home.

And those in the marketplace don’t just want any kind of work or wage either. Like any self-respecting man, they want something they can be proud of when they return home. It’s not just about making money; they also want their honor and their dignity to remain intact, so they won’t be ashamed when they look their wife and kids in the face. And while I could preach on the importance of that alone for quite some time, I’ll save that sermon for another day.

The master of the house, though, for his part—he goes to market early on in the day. And by the end of the parable and all the way through from here on out, it’s all very clear that he looks for those in need so that he can be good to them, so that when it was all said and done, all those who were called into service in his vineyard would truly know and experience first-hand what generous mercy and grace truly are.

So, the master gathers one group of laborers, and they agree to terms—one denarius for one full day’s work—and they gladly go and get busy.

The day is far from finished when they begin, of course, but then again, so is the noble work of the master.

He, in fact, returns to the marketplace at the third hour, about 9am, to do as he did before, sending yet another group of laborers into his vineyard, only this time simply promising to pay them what is just.

And he does this again at the sixth hour, and again at the ninth, and *again* he goes, even at the eleventh hour, even at 5pm, with daylight fading fast, with all hope nearly gone, even *then* the master goes out searching and calling people into his service, promising to save them and their families from the fate that awaited.

And if I could speak especially to the gentlemen here, brothers, just think how you’d feel if you were in their spot, out hoping to find a job to make ends meet even for one day and you knew you’d have to go home to an anxious wife and hungry children only to say, “I have nothing to show for being gone all day. Dinner is going to be light; you’ll probably go to bed hungry. But hopefully, tomorrow will be different.”

Just think how you’d feel facing that when suddenly at the eleventh hour, just one hour before quitting time, you see the face of that same noble man returning once more to the market to find you and call you into his service, promising you wages, promising to spare you and your family from what would otherwise happen. Just think of that.

Well, together, all those called into the vineyard were trusting that the master would be true to his word, and for *this*, not one of them, from the first to the last, was put to shame. But some of them, though—those hired first—they were certainly scandalized by the grace they saw being given to others. And the question today is: what about you?

Our text says that when evening came, “the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them *the wage*’—it doesn’t say ‘wages’ in the Greek text. There’s only one wage for laborers in the vineyard being given, beginning with the *last*, up to the first.

And dear ones, those called into the vineyard at the very beginning of the day watched as group after group ahead of them was lavished with generous, unmerited kindness. Again and again and again they watched the master show favor to those who knew full well they didn’t deserve it.

It was no secret to anyone what was going on. It was clear to everyone that this was pure grace being put on display right in front of their eyes. And that takes us right to the heart of the matter, now doesn't it?

What is your response when you see the grace of God being given to sinners who've turned and listened to the voice of Jesus—the alcoholic, the drug addict, the abuser and the adulterer, and all those who may have lived as complete scoundrels their *whole* life until, at the eleventh hour, when it seemed all hope for salvation was lost, at last they hear the promise of the Gospel calling them into the vineyard of the holy Christian Church, and by sheer grace alone, our Lord and Master gives them equal status and standing with us as the baptized, and they're saved?

How do you respond?

Well, here's how those hired first saw things; here's how they responded: they grumbled at the master. They hated what they saw, but he says to them, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or is your eye evil because I am good?"

The truth is, even if we've borne many burdens while serving our Master, it has cost *us* nothing for Him to be so good and so generous with His grace. But it *has* cost *Him* everything.

Jesus has labored long to fulfill the whole law for us, so that He could make His merit our own and credit us with His righteousness through faith. He has borne the burden of the cross for us, to atone for all our sins. Surely, we would all be *lost* in sin and shame had Christ not found us and called us by the Gospel into His holy Church.

And the *only* wages we didn't deserve to have Him take from us are the wages of sin, which is death. That He has taken from us, and what a service He's done for us, which we didn't deserve.

So, no matter what hour it was when you came into the vineyard, we must all see one another as those who have the honor of knowing and serving such a generous Master who has shown us all the riches of His grace.

Let there be no grumbling among us, but together with one voice, let us sing His praises instead.

To the Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.