

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

October 16, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ “ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.¹¹When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” (NIV)

One thing I never like to hear is this: *“Everyone gets the same.”* I just can’t stand that for some reason and let me give you a few examples. Take an athletic contest where you work hard and compete and try to do your best to beat the others. You know who won and who was in what place, but then the announcement comes in telling everyone they are all winners. Everyone gets the same trophy or even worse the dreaded participation ribbon. I never cared for that. The same with academics when a teacher has a test and you study very hard and you prepare and you know others have not studied or prepared the same as you. But then for some reason the teacher says I know you all worked hard so I am giving everyone an A. That always made me mad. One more example for you is when I was in high school and college I served as a waiter in a small but nice restaurant on weekends. I had a good relationship with many of the regulars and usually got tipped pretty well. But at this restaurant we had to place all our tips into a jar and at the end of the night all the wait staff split them. We all got the same – even those who did not work as hard or give as good of service. I detested that.

Perhaps you feel the same as me. Do you like it when everyone gets the same? Or do you think that those who work harder, those that do better, those who have achieved more should be rewarded as such? How would you like it if your company decided tomorrow that everyone will be paid the same from the janitor to the president? Does that seem fair to you?

Dear Christian friends, perhaps this is what makes the gracious way God deals with sinners far above our way and what puts God’s thoughts way above our thoughts. Perhaps we need to hear again that the first will be last and the last will be first. Perhaps

we can see ourselves all too clearly in Jesus' parable today. I pray our eyes are opened this morning to rejoice in this truth: **God Generously Gives us the Same!**

Jesus teaches a parable in which He compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who goes out early to hire men to work in his vineyard. This landowner graciously gives them work and he agrees to give them a denarius for the day – a very fair wage. But the landowner wasn't done yet. He graciously goes out and finds more people, some standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He calls them to work in his vineyard. The landowner keeps going out graciously giving work to those who had none. After hiring those in the early morning he goes out again at, "***the third hour...the sixth hour...the ninth hour...and the eleventh hour***". At 9:00a.m., 12:00p.m., 3:00p.m., and at 5:00p.m., he continually brings people in and gives them work.

Everything seems to be going well for these workers as the day comes to an end and it is time for them to receive their denarius. According to Leviticus, payment under Jewish law was at sunset at 6:00p.m. So the landowner begins to pay his workers. Starting with the last ones brought in, he gives them each a denarius. What a generous offer to receive a full days pay for one hour of work! And this is given to them without obligation, they aren't asked to come back and make up for lost time. At this point can you imagine what the workers who started first are thinking they will get? But when they get paid last they also receive a denarius – they all get the same. These workers are upset and feel they deserve more. They say it is not fair for us "***who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day***".

And then to one of these grumblers the landowner turns and says: (and listen closely because this is the main point) "***Friend, I am not being unfair to you? Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?***" You see what these workers considered to be unfair wasn't really unfair to them at all. The landowner came to them, gave them work when they had none, and paid them a very fair wage. The landowner basically tells this one grumbler "***Buddy, I am not being unfair to you, take your pay and get out of here. It is my money. Are you really envious because I am so generous?***"

Do you understand what Jesus is teaching us in this parable today? The landowner is our gracious God who calls sinners into His kingdom. God's kingdom is one of grace. We do not deserve to be in it but God brings us in. He calls us to faith in Christ and puts us to work. But it is not our works that earn us God's favor. The more we do doesn't result in more forgiveness or a higher standing in heaven. Those gifts are only ours because our God is generous. So when we start to think like the Pharisees that we are better than those around us, when we start to think we are first, God says we will be last. He says take your pay and go.

There is warning for us here when we start to think we deserve more from God than others, when we look down on other Christians who are weaker than us, when we start to criticize those who tend to do less "work" in the Church than we do. When we start to think this way it is easy to begin thinking that we deserve more. Then we are grumbling against God and becoming envious of His grace. We are misunderstanding God's grace. What do we think we have earned? Go ahead and let us try to tell God what we really deserve. Every one of us has earned the same because the wages of sin is

death. What we have earned is hell. If we ask God for the wages we think we deserve that is what we will get.

This is why I pray none of us misses the main point of this parable. Our God is generous. He is generous to us all because the only one God really treated unfairly was Jesus. Jesus was God's only true and faithful worker and yet God threw Jesus out of His vineyard. He made Jesus pay the wages of sin. On the cross Jesus suffered the punishment we deserved, and died the death that should have been ours. But Jesus willingly went to the cross with our sins, He willingly went to His death, so that God could be generous to us all. Jesus lived and died for us so that we are able to enjoy forever His victory over the grave. Jesus did it all, so that God could come to us with His Word and Sacraments and bring us into His kingdom of grace. God is a generous landowner!

Now what is our attitude as we serve Him? Why should we ever be jealous because God is generous? Thanks be to God that He wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth! Thanks be to God that He keeps calling sinners to repentance up to the eleventh hour. So I pray we gladly serve our generous landowner. It is an awesome privilege to serve in God's kingdom whether we serve like Samuel who served the Lord faithfully his whole life beginning from when he was a little boy serving in the temple courts to the day he was buried. Or like Saul who spent half his life as a Christian persecutor before he became Paul the apostle and model missionary. Or like the thief on the cross who only served the Lord on earth during the last hours of his life. Rejoice that our generous God gives us the same. In Jesus He forgives all our sins and pays us all equally – equally richly with eternal life.

When it comes to how God treats us with His grace the words: *“Everyone gets the same”* become music to our ears. For God is generous. He loves us all and gives us all blessings we certainly have not earned nor deserved. He has by grace called each of us to faith and to now work in His wonderful vineyard, in His kingdom of grace. Since our generous God gives us the same may we now sing: **As lab’ers in your vineyard, Lord give us work to do, Content to bear the burden Of weary days for you, To ask no other wages When you will call us home Then to have shared the labor That makes your kingdom come. (CW 559) Amen.**