

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went.

“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ 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?’ ⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸ “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.’

⁹ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘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.’

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

This is God’s Word.

Dear fellow laborers in God’s Kingdom,

These verses before us today are a parable that Jesus told his disciples in answer to Peter’s question in chapter 19, **“We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”** (Matthew 19:27). Peter was thinking of things in human terms and at times, we to think – what’s fair to us? It’s not about what we do for God but more so what God does for us. So the question we want to consider and the point Jesus was trying to make with his disciples is, “Are our hearts in tune with God’s heart?”

When Jesus told a parable, he used people or items to represent certain things. In this parable the landowner represents God, the workers are those who have received the invitation of the gospel and the vineyard is the kingdom of God. You are the laborers in the vineyard but which laborer are you? Are you one of the ones hired first or second or last? Does it make any difference which laborer you are or are there big differences between the laborers. Let’s see if we can figure out where we fit into this parable of Jesus.

First let’s look at the vineyard. Remember we said this represents the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is where God’s work is being done – namely, where the Gospel is being proclaimed. God’s grace has prepared that kingdom for those whom God has called.

God prepared his vineyard when he sent his Son into the world to pay for the sins of the world. Without Jesus Christ there is no gospel message and thus there is no vineyard because there is no reason for God to call us. Without Jesus Christ we are on our own and if we stand before God all alone the only thing apparent to God is our sins.

But Jesus Christ changes everything. God sees his Son paying for the sins of the world. The cross of Christ makes it possible for a miraculous exchange to happen. Jesus trades his righteousness for our sins. The key to this great exchange is faith and the Holy Spirit gives us this faith to make this exchange possible. Faith not only brings us the righteousness God demands but also helps us see the generosity of our God.

Thus, it's all about God's grace. God's grace prepares the vineyard for us and God's grace calls us to the vineyard to work. Notice that the landowner went out at the 3rd hour, the 6th hour, the 9th hour and the 11th hour. God's Word goes out at various times and in various ways with that invitation to come into the Kingdom of God. That is God's initiative at work. We don't make a move in God's direction, he comes to us and calls us to come into his vineyard.

When we come into the vineyard there is plenty of work for all. Once again God's grace is at work giving us the ability and strength to work in his kingdom in various ways. Think of all the ways in which we labor for the Lord.

Maybe you are an usher, or sing in the choir, or teach Sunday School, or serve on the Church Council, or run and record the worship services, or maybe you pray for the different people and activities involved with our ministry. Every week we collect an offering of our gifts to support the work in the kingdom of heaven. There is so much to be done, but we can only do it by the grace of God. He is the one who has changed our hearts and given us the opportunity to serve him. We want to do this not because of what we will get out of it, but because of what we have already received.

I had a shut-in in my former congregation that was always happy. No matter what was going on he always had a smile on his face and that was amazing because he had a lot of physical challenges but one of his favorite sayings was, "The golden years aren't so golden. A lot of times they're pretty rusty." But he was happy because he had Jesus in his life and it was his faith in Jesus that helped him through life and helped him to have a happy disposition.

We, as a Christian, always have a reason to have joy in our hearts. Jesus has lifted you out of the despair of unbelief and brought you the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. You know God is in control of your life. You know that he will take care of you and shower you with his blessings. We just have to remember that blessings come in so many forms and a lot of times they're not material blessings but spiritual blessings.

Those blessings of God give our life purpose. We want to say thank you to our God and labor in his kingdom joyfully. Those blessings help us focus on our Savior and what he has done for us. God's Word brings us those blessings and guides us in our labor for our Lord.

But not all the laborers see it that way. **“⁹And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. ¹⁰“And when those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; and they also received each one a denarius. ¹¹“And when they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, ¹² saying, ‘These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’”**

All Christians receive the same reward – the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Some labor for the Lord all their lives and some are called to work at the 11th hour – near the end of their lives but the call to faith brings the same result. It’s easy to fall into the trap of focusing on yourself and getting caught up in work-righteousness – thinking you should get what you deserve. That’s what happened to the 1st group of workers – they insisted on the wage they thought they deserved while the other workers agreed to whatever the landowner thought was fair. The 1st group was disappointed when they got what they had negotiated for rather than relying on the landowner’s generosity.

When we start focusing on ourselves and what we have done we start to lose sight of what Christ has done for us. Then we want to receive what we have earned not what Christ earned for us. If we fall into that trap, as the laborers who grumbled did, we will not be first. We will be last.

In this case, when Jesus said, **“Thus the last shall be first, and the first last.”** He was saying those who want what they have earned will be outside the Kingdom of Heaven. They can only earn eternal death and that is what they will have as they focus on their works. They are not in tune with the landowner – they are not in tune with God.

What kind of laborer are you? One who grumbles that others are getting more than you or one who marvels at the generosity of the landowner? When it comes to church is your first thought, “What’s in it for me?” or do you look forward to the opportunity to marvel at the wisdom found in God’s Word and the privilege he gives you to worship him with other Christians. It’s so easy to fall into that trap of focusing on ourselves and to quickly lose focus of what’s important in life. It’s so easy to ignore God’s grace and think we can do better by ourselves, but we can’t.

Thank God that Jesus Christ paid even for those times when we focus on ourselves and tend to forget we are lost without him. Don’t be one of those laborers who grumbled and thought he deserved more. Don’t be one of those laborers that was told to take what you have – grumbling and all – and leave.

Get your heart in tune with God’s heart through the precious promises found in His Word. Then the blessings your Lord has showered on you **will become apparent** and you will be one of those laborers who marvels at generosity of our God and then, no matter what is going on in our lives, we will have the joy and peace of God’s salvation to carry us forward. Amen.