

“The Joy of Work in the Vineyard”

Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” He offers them the standard wage, and they work all day in the fields. He then went out and hired more. There is much work to be done. The first men hired probably welcomed the later workers. It is always good to have a little extra help. Then more workers came. And again later, more workers came.

And when the wages were given out at the end of the day, the once-welcomed extra help caused a grumbling among those who bore the heat of the day. “They don’t deserve that much.” It is sort of like the attitude that, I am sure, is present in your work place. There is always “that guy” who doesn’t do diddly, but makes as much or more than you do. Or perhaps it is like watching a professional athlete. “They get paid how much? for playing a game? They don’t deserve that.”

But the overpaid athlete is an easy target. And workplace envy, class envy, envy of the wealthy is not what Jesus is talking about. As is

usual within all His parables, Jesus is describing the grand, generous, gracious, giving nature of God our Father in heaven, while also teaching His listeners the proper attitude and understanding we are to have toward our neighbors and fellow workers.

Find yourself in this parable. If you were blessed to be baptized as an infant, raised in Christ's Church, participating in the worship life of the family of God, participating in the Body and Blood of our Lord at His Table, and filled with the joy of God's Word throughout your entire life, then you are blessed – as I have been blessed.

But not everyone has that as their history. Many people come to faith later in life. Like those hired at the third hour or the sixth hour, many people waste the early years of their life. Some people remain ignorant and outside the vineyard until the eleventh hour.

Among those who have lived their entire life within the Church, there can be a similar attitude to that of the workers in the parable who bore the heat of the day. There are those who say that it is not fair that someone who makes a "deathbed confession" receives the same reward as someone who taught Sunday School for 40 years. They get to roam around, do as they please, be an obnoxious jerk, do unspeakable things, sleep in on Sunday morning all their life and then hear God's call, believe, confess, and live forever. That doesn't seem fair.

It is a false image to believe that the eleventh hour worker had a better day than the worker hired at sunrise. He did not. The worker hired at the end of the day spent his day not knowing how he was going to feed his family. What was he going to tell his wife when he got home? What was he going to say to his kids when he had no day's wage for food.

The worker hired at sunrise knew that his master was going to take care of him and provide for him. Yes, the early morning worker shouldered much more of the burden, but the early morning worker had a much better day, because the eleventh hour worker spent 11 hours in ignorance and distress with no hope that any good will come at the end of the day.

The notion that life outside of Christ's church is better or more fun than life in the church is a completely false premise. It is a lie. Unfortunately, it is a lie that has been willfully swallowed by so many. To live without real hope; to live without the assurance that you have a Lord and Master to take care of and provide for you – that is a burden much heavier than the labor within the Vineyard.

Jesus says elsewhere, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." There is peace and rest within Christ's Church. There is comfort knowing that at the end of the day, our Master will provide for everything

we need.

There is plenty of labor, there is plenty of work to be done within the Kingdom of God. We are to welcome any worker. And our work is meant to bring us comfort and joy knowing that we are blessed with a great hope for our future.

Our hope and our confidence does not find its strength in the amount of our work accomplished, or in the length of time that we have devoted to work within the Kingdom of God. Our hope and confidence is in the work that Christ has done for us on our behalf. He paid the ransom price for our sin. He died and rose again, so that we can have our place within the Kingdom. The work that we do is in thanks for what God our Master has promised and has already provided.

As Paul says in our Epistle reading, as long as I am living in the flesh, there is fruitful labor for me – just as there is for you. Remember that your work within the Kingdom is a joy, because with hope and confidence, you can accomplish your work knowing that, at the end of the day, your Master will provide for you all that He has promised.

And the best part is that the hope and the promise at the end of the day is not just to receive the denarius for our daily bread, but our Master has promised the full inheritance of all that He has. Amen.