

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 17
Saturday, September 23, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 24, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“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 (or former 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 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 or the ninth hour, many people waste the early years of their life. Some people come to “work” early and spend the middle of their “day” not doing the work of the Master – being “that guy.” There are far too many who, shall we say, take a spiritual lunch break that lasts a really long time. And some people remain ignorant and outside the vineyard until the eleventh hour.

Among those who have lived their entire life within the church and have never stopped “doing the work of the Master,” 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, perhaps be an obnoxious jerk, perhaps do unspeakable things, sleep in on Sunday morning or play golf 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 and food might be a little slim this week.

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 real 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. It's like saying that living your life in your mom's basement playing video games, covered in Cheeto dust is a better life than getting up and going to work five days a week.

Unfortunately, that lie has been willfully swallowed by many, just like the false narrative in our society about what life is truly like being active in the Kingdom of God. To live without purpose would be so depressing. But to live without real hope for what lies beyond this life; to live without the knowledge, and faith, and assurance that you have a Lord and Master who has opened the way to salvation,

who is the Way to salvation – that is a burden much heavier than the labor within the Vineyard.

The promise made to you at your Baptism is sure. At the end of the day, your Lord, your Master, will provide for you and give you much more than just a denarius for your daily bread – as Luther reminds us in the catechism that God provides daily bread “without our prayers, even to all evil people.” Our life of faith is not about material blessings. Our Master has promised the full inheritance of all that He has.

That is what is promised at Baptism. We are much more than just random workers in the field of the world. We have been adopted by our Master. We have been given the family name. Our hope and our confidence does not find its strength in the amount of work we accomplish, 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 we heard Paul say, as long as I am living in the flesh, there is fruitful labor for me – and for you. Remember that your work within the Kingdom is a joy. And we work knowing that, at the end of the day, your Master will provide for you all that He has promised. Amen.