

Theme: "The Merciful Lord of the vineyard"

Text: Matthew 20:1-16

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together". Amen

The text for meditation for this morning is from the Gospel of Matthew 20:1-16, which I read before. Let us pray: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen

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The text for meditation for this morning speaks about the owner of a vineyard who did something out of the ordinary. He gave the same salary to all the workers who worked in his vineyard despite that not all of them worked the same amount of time. Those workers who started working early were not so happy. They got up early morning, and they went to the market seeking for a job. The Lord of the vineyard comes and hired them to work for him. He offered them a denary for the whole day, and they worked in the field in the harsh heat of the day.

While they were working, the master goes several times to the market. On each occasion, he brings people to work in his vineyard, and he even returns to the market when there is only one hour left of work. "And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'⁷They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'" (v.6-7)

When it was time to get pay; everybody received the same salary, even those who worked an hour. Those workers who worked all day thought that they would receive more money for their work. But they receive the same amount of money. They said: "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." No doubt these men were mad at the Lord of the vineyard and probably they looked with disdain to the men who worked only one hour or a few hours. These workers considered that the master had not treated them fairly.

Is the lord of the vineyard unjust? Let's find about this. He is the one who built His vineyard, and made it fit to accommodate a good number of workers. He went to the market a few times seeking for workers who were unemployed, and with no security at all.

The owner could have looked for others that had more initiative. But he hired these workers and gave them safety, protection and a place to work. He knows he will not get much benefit of those workers he hired later in the day, but still he want them in his vineyard. At the end of the day when it was time to pay the workers, the owner paid them - not based on their work and the time spent in the field, but based on his generosity.

For the first workers that the owner hired, the master was acting unjustly with them. They thought that they deserve more money and the others deserve less money. But, the owner is paying what he had promised them to pay. What was bothering the workers who worked all day is that the other workers only worked a few hours and they were getting the same amount of money while they worked all day, under the severe heat of the sun.

If we measure the owner of the vineyard for the efforts, hard work and attitudes of the workers, this is a bad place to be. But if you measure the master for his efforts, attitude, and mercy toward all workers this is the best place to be.

Jesus was using this story to tell people something about God and what it means to live in God's kingdom. The Lord at all times invites people to come to His kingdom. The master of the vineyard goes many times to the market seeking for workers to work in his vineyard. The Gospel of Jesus Christ invites us, at all time, to enjoy the benefit that His kingdom provides. The point that Jesus is making about God and His call to live and work for Him is that God is more than fair. Our God is the God of grace, and life in His kingdom is lived under His grace.

Jesus through His Word reminds us that He has died for all people. That on the cross He washed forever our sins, and He assures us that we are part of His kingdom. He continuously proclaims the good news of our salvation and feed us with His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. What a merciful Lord we have.

And He knows very well that many will reject His invitation to come to His kingdom, but He always seek people to be part of it. No doubt many will come to God's kingdom later in their life, and even others will come to the Lord before their last breath. But, rest assured my dear friends in Christ that by faith in Jesus Christ, these people receive forgiveness of their sins, and a place to be in heaven. While the Gospel is still proclaimed there is hope for all. Our salvation is not based by our work, merits, deeds or intellect. No. It is based for what our Lord did on the cross for us. Our salvation has been accomplished by Christ.

In today Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah says: "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7).

Do we have a merciful Lord that seek for all and even accept those people who come to Him before their last breath? Yes indeed. Some may say that this is not fair. According to our human thinking is not fair. The Lord continues speaking through the prophet in our first reading: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD." (Is.55:8).

My dear friends in Christ; our Lord is far more than fair. He is a Just and a Merciful Lord who has brought us to heaven through the work of Jesus Christ. He loves us as no one can love us. While we are here on earth working in His kingdom we should be happy that others, even though they come later to His kingdom, receive the same blessings that we receive. Unfortunately, sometimes we are tempted to measure the kingdom of God not for the forgiveness and abundant grace of our Lord, but by the works of what we do, as the first workers in the parable did. It looks logic when we think this way.

We struggle in life to keep our faith in Christ; we work tireless in God's kingdom; we go to the church very often; we work hard in many committees; we suffer all kind of offenses and contempt for God's kingdom, and much more. Yes, all the things that we do are good

for the kingdom of God, but it is wrong if we try to enter into His kingdom through our deeds and merits. This is not the way of the Lord. It is not how God works. He has paid the price for our sin through His suffering. If we teach that we are saved by our efforts, whether totally or in part, then we teach that Jesus' death on the cross was not good enough for our salvation. Moreover, there is the false understanding that we had come to the kingdom of heaven for what Jesus has done, but once we are inside we must work hard to maintain that privilege. This false teaching says that we daily should prove our worthiness and that we deserve to be with God through the things that we do or not do.

This way of thinking and teaching reveals that Jesus has not done enough to save us; consequently He has not done enough to bring us into His kingdom. We all should recognize that we are sinful workers and we should not boast by our efforts, or the things we do for the kingdom. We should recognize that we are unprofitable servants at God's service. Instead of showing off our works, we should confess that we fail, and seek God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. He has done all the work for us. If our salvation were based by our efforts, we can never be sure that we are saved. But because Christ has done it we can rest in peace.

In our text; the first workers had to work all day under the heat of the sun. But, this is nothing compared with what Jesus had to go through in order to save us. He carried on His shoulders the sin of the world. He resisted till the end the heat of hell when He suffered for our transgressions. The only reason that we have been included in the vineyard of the Lord is because the Son of God has brought us in. We should not boast that we have been longer in the kingdom of God than others. Rather, we should thank the Lord that He has provided us with a shelter for so long and that He continues gathering more people through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Now, we rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins, that we are set free to serve the Lord in the tasks He has given us to do. And we should rejoice that others come to participate with us in this feast even though they come late. The Lord of the vineyard seeks us at all time, and today He has brought to His kingdom another child through baptism.

Today, He has come to claim Shania as His dear child. We pray that He sustain her all her life, and keep her in faith till the end. By grace, through faith in Jesus who suffered on our behalf, we may enter the kingdom of God. That's the call to you right now. Enter because God in Christ has forgiven you and reconciled you to himself. Enter because God is good to you beyond that which you can ever deserve. Enter because God loves you and wants you. Enter the kingdom where you work, your service, your giving, your singing, are all part of our joyous response to God's having called you from idleness "to live under Jesus in His kingdom and serve Him forever." Amen

"The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour". Amen