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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Septuagesima

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Text: Matthew 20:1–16

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The sermon hymn for today, “Salvation unto Us Has Come” is one of the great hymns in our Church. It was written by Paul Speratus in 1523 while he was imprisoned for preaching the free gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ without the works of the law. It was reported that Martin Luther wept with joy and thankfulness when he first heard this hymn sung. Speratus was eventually released from prison and continued to preach the gospel of salvation in Christ which he so beautifully summarized in this great hymn. Consider the first stanza:

Salvation unto us has come By God’s free grace and favor;  
Good works cannot avert our doom, They help and save us never.  
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, Who did for all the world atone;  
He is our one Redeemer. (LSB 555.1)

The salvation of sinners comes by God’s free grace and favor. We know this Biblical truth. It forms the cornerstone of everything we believe as Christians. Today’s text from Matthew 20 teaches us about this marvelous, divine grace, by which we mean, God’s divine, undeserved favor.

In this text, Jesus give a straightforward parable that teaches us about the kingdom of heaven. A master, who represents God the Father, needs workers to bring in the harvest of his vineyard. He finds workers at the beginning of the day, roughly 6 am, and makes an agreement with them. They will be paid a standard wage of one denarius for 12 hours of work. Throughout the day, the master finds more workers. Some begin at 9 am, some at noon, others at 3 pm, Finally, he even hires workers at 5 pm and sends them to work for the last hour of the day.

At 6 pm, all the workers are lined up in order beginning with those hired last until those hired first so that they can be paid their wages. And this is the shocking thing. All workers are paid the same wage, regardless of how many hours they worked. One

denarius. That's the grace of God which caused Paul Speratus to write his marvelous hymn. Salvation unto us has come by God's free grace and favor.

You can well imagine those who have worked 12 hours are angry at the master for paying them the same as the ones who worked by 1 hour. In vs. 12, we hear their response. "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" (vs. 12).

And that's the point. Jesus tells this parable so that we can know that the kingdom of heaven works with principles that are quite different from the practices of the world. In the God's kingdom, the Father does things by grace. All Christians believe in the same Christ, the same Gospel and all share in a common salvation. One Christian can't be "more saved" than another Christian.

In the world, there must be inequality because each person is different; each possessing different talents and abilities, as well as unique weaknesses and frailties. But in Christ, the farmer, the teacher, the president, the apostle, the prophets, all stand together as equals under God's grace. Each receive the same water baptism for the forgiveness of sins. In Christ, the slave is equal to his master; the last is made equal to the first (vs. 16). The life-long Christian possesses the same promise of salvation and eternal life as the gross sinner who repents and believes only seconds before death. Citizenship in heaven is based strictly upon the goodness and love of Christ alone and not upon the accomplishments of the individual. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of grace, undeserved divine favor established in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first group, those hired early in the morning, grumble at the gracious character of the master, according to vs. 11. It's just not right to work 12 hours and be paid the same as the one who only worked 1 hour. Even after the first group voices its complaint, the landowner only gives what he promised at the beginning. Grace will prevail from beginning to end.

We must keep in mind that it's the master of the house who goes out to find workers, that includes even the first group. God seeks the lost and brings them into His kingdom. Not the other way around. We sinners don't find God and prove ourselves worthy to enter into the vineyard. All workers must simply trust in the goodness of the master. The application for us in the Church is crystal clear. Everyone who enters the kingdom of God through faith in Christ, whether early or late, receives the same grace. Some come early. They are baptized as infants and remain in the church their

entire lives. Others come in the middle of their lives. Some late, maybe just days or weeks before they die. But they all receive the same saving grace in Christ. All their sins are forgiven because of Jesus, the Savior of sinners.

At the end of the parable, Jesus asks two questions, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?” (vs. 15). The questions have an implied answer. But Jesus leaves it unsaid so that we can wrestle with their implications. How you answer depends upon whether or not you understand Christ’s teaching on grace. For grace is defined in parable (vs. 4) as “whatever is right” in the eyes of the master who represents God.

The Biblical Gospel teaches us that “whatever is right” in the eyes of the Father is based upon the love and mercy of His Son who died for the sins of the whole world. Ultimately, that’s where God’s grace is concretely defined and exemplified. Whenever you want to think rightly about God’s grace, look to Jesus throughout His entire earthly ministry. But in particular, look to Jesus on the cross shedding His blood to atone for the sins of every human being. All true preaching and the proper administration of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the grace of the crucified and resurrected Jesus coming directly to the sinner. The cross of Jesus is the Father’s declaration, “This is right and good for the salvation of sinners.” And that grace is founded upon God’s steadfast love for the world.

It’s this teaching, that sinner stand righteous and forgiven before God on account of Christ alone, that the Church either stands or falls. Lose this teaching and the Church ceases to be the Church. With this glorious truth, the Church triumphs and stands forever.

We Christians live under God the Father’s pronouncement, “whatever is right I will give you.” Therein we are content. And joy of joys! We learn in the Scriptures that “whatever is right in the Father’s eyes” includes all of heaven and earth. That is no exaggeration. I Corinthians 3:21-23 says:

<sup>21</sup>So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup>whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, <sup>23</sup>and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

By God’s grace established in Christ, all things are ours. Not because we earned them. No. They are given to us by God’s free grace and favor through Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is what is right in the Father's eyes. Christ Jesus is the Lord of grace. Faith looks to Christ alone who did for all the world atone. He is our one Redeemer. May we always rejoice in His wonderful, amazing grace.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.