

2014\_09\_21 Pentecost 15  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
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**SAVED BY GRACE: This is Right in God's Eyes**

Matthew 20:1–16

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

***Matthew 20:1–16***

*"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. <sup>5</sup> Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. <sup>6</sup> And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup> They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'*

*<sup>8</sup> "So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.' <sup>9</sup> And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. <sup>11</sup> And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.' <sup>13</sup> But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. <sup>15</sup> Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."*

Let us pray, O Lord, teach us to know your grace. Amen.

In the name of our Lord Jesus to whom is all authority in heaven and on earth, who was first, but has become last, in order that we who are last might become first, dear fellow laborers in His grace,

"Human beings are driven at the core by competition." These are the words of an economist. Benedict Herman is an economist and policy officer for the European

Commission. But he might be better known among economists as “the scholar of spite.”

I like to listen to a podcast on my phone called “Freakonomics.” In an episode, they interview Dr. Herman who argues that humans at the core are driven by competition.

To demonstrate his theory, he used what economists call “the ultimatum game.” He randomly selected participants and seated them anonymously at a computer. One player was given \$10 and told to divide it between himself and this other anonymous person. Let’s say, he divides the money \$7 ... \$3. The other player, receiving the \$7, is given an ultimatum. He can either accept the money and both parties keep what they have; or he can reject the deal, causing the giving person to lose his share.

The experiment showed that rarely would anyone accept this deal. Rarely would anyone accept anything less than 25%. That is to say, in general, people were willing to throw away \$2 or \$3 dollars, in order to make sure the other person loses their \$7 or \$8 dollars. It was a case of spite.

He called the model: “homo-rivalis,” arguing that human beings are driven at the core by “rivalry,” by competition, by making sure that what I’m getting, is equal to or better than the next guy. Which presents these peculiar situations where a person is complaining about what otherwise would be a benefit.

In our parable, the worker has worked 12 hours and receives exactly what was agreed upon – a denarius; that is, he receives a day’s wage. So why is he complaining? In the words of an economist: “human beings are, at the core, driven by competition.”

A conflict arises between man and God. A conflict exists between what we consider just and right and what God considers just and right. There is something in us that is bent on rivalry; something at our core that is driven by the idea that we must outdo the next guy and that God must reward us accordingly. If we do more, we deserve more. If a person is devoutly religious all his life, he must deserve something better than the person who never goes to church. And we find ourselves labeled: homo-rivalis – for we are in rivalry with each other, in rivalry with God.

But God does not deal with us as we are used to dealing with each other. His kingdom rules in a different way. He gives to the last first. He gives in equal measure to him who has worked 1 hour as He does to him who has worked 12 hours. And He says, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?”

## **SAVED BY GRACE: This is Right in God's Eyes**

Christ gets up early and He stays late. He wakes early in the morning, and goes out in search of those who will have a part in his harvest. He goes into the world and begins to call people into his kingdom.

He first finds the life-long Lutheran. He finds that type of Lutheran who knows what it means to be Lutheran; he knows what the terms "sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura" mean ... and even more so, he knows what the word "POT-LUCK" means. And the Landowner puts him to work early on – placing him directly into turmoil, he sees his own synod being torn apart by divisions and differences in teaching. He has to make a choice for the truth and ends up sacrificing friends, job, even family, in order to break fellowship with false teaching and join a fellowship that is true to God's Word. He bears the scorching heat that burns in his flesh as he has to let go of that community he once knew so well, in order to remain in the light of Christ. A deal has been struck. Christ calls him into his vineyard, into the work of his kingdom, into his harvest, and agrees to give to him what is righteous. He says, "Labor for me your whole life, and I will give you what is right."

Then he goes out again and finds another. This gal was baptized Lutheran, but since high school, she lost touch. She stopped attending church around the age 18 and has since stopped caring about the emails she receives from her parents about coming back to church. She has been idle for years, wandering about the world in search of something more meaningful. She's been divorced three times, in and out of work, and spending most of her life being angry at everyone else. That is, until he finds her. He finds her in a state of pain. She has been diagnosed with breast cancer and has no one she cares to tell, no one to talk to. She is in a state of emptiness, a loneliness in her life where nothing seems to matter, and he calls her; he chooses her to come into His kingdom. He says, "Go to work in My kingdom, and I will give you what is right."

Then he goes out again and again, 9:00, noon, 3:00, finding others who are wandering, idle, no purpose, no direction; he keeps on calling until the daylight is growing thin. The sun is low and there is yet one hour remaining. The eleventh hour. The landowner goes out yet again and finds a group of people standing around, doing nothing but waiting for the end that they know is fast approaching.

In this final group he finds some who have never been to church; some who have lived their whole life actively promoting sinful behavior; those who are standing idle.

In this last group, he finds a drug addict who has lived most of his life doing nothing but hurting those close to him. He has lied, stolen, coerced, even killed – all in search of another fix. He's been in and out of prison, in and out of homelessness, until now, at the eleventh hour, he finds himself in a nursing home, ready to die at the young age of 65. He has burnt so many bridges around him that now he lays on his bed, all alone in a nursing home, with nothing more than death to keep him company.

And a voice says, "Why have you been standing her idle all day? Go to work in my kingdom and I will give you what is right."

The day draws to a close and the sun sets on the labor of Christ's kingdom. And Christ begins calling in those who have labored. He begins with the last. Beginning with the drug addict, he give them what is right. Beginning with the last, he gives to each of them: eternal life.

But the life-long Lutheran is confused. "Wait a minute. That guy has only put in one hour while I've put in twelve ... that just doesn't add up." Let's say you put in a 12 hour day at \$10 / hour. You clock in at 6:00 a.m. and clock out at 6:00 p.m. The day's over and what does the boss give you? \$120. Now along comes another guy who clocks in at 5:00 p.m. and clocks out at 6:00 – only 1 hour's work. The day's over and what does the boss give him? \$120. "Wait a minute!" I'm getting paid \$10 / hr, and he's getting \$120 / hr.

"It just doesn't add up. I have done far beyond what that other Christian has done. I was first to the church work day and the last to leave. My church attendance is not perfect, but it is sure better than that girl who hasn't been in church for 30 years. My marriage isn't perfect, but it is sure better than that gal who was divorced three times. My life isn't perfect, but it is sure better than the drug addict who has lied, stolen, and murdered. I was the first one in and the last to leave; I've been to church work days, served on committees, brought meals to the pot lucks, and always brought my kids to Sunday School. How can give me the same as them?"

Homo-rivalis has reared his ugly head. Yes, we are driven at the core by competition. How do we measure up? Are we willing to give up our \$3, just to make sure the other guy doesn't get his \$7? For that day's wage is forfeited as soon as we think that we are in anyway saved by what we do for God. Our eye is evil and we do not see things as God sees them. God sees more than what is on the surface.

So Christ responds, "You clocked in; you clocked out; good. But just what did you do in between? Were you so active? When the sun beat down on you – did you not

complain? Did you never grumble? Are you not grumbling right now? Are you not idle right now. I would rather you be idle in the marketplace and not in my vineyard. You see, just “clocking” in is not what saves you. And even outdoing the next guy will not save you.

*Ephesians 2:8–9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

This is right in God’s eyes. For he has seen what lies in us, the sinful rivalry we wage with each other, always trying to be first, always trying to get a little more than the next guy, not content with being last and letting the other guy who doesn’t deserve it, be first, and this will not be part of His kingdom. We live in a world driven by competition, but God reigns in a kingdom which is different: where we are driven to the end of the line, and there in last place, He saves us. He saves by His grace and not our works. He saves us because of Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus who is first in and last out. He gets up earliest and stays latest and is never idle, never grumbling, never grudging God’s call or grace toward you who have done nothing.

Just verses later, Jesus says, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed, condemned, delivered, and crucified.” Jesus never stops, never rests until the work is done, and He does it perfectly, selflessly, for You. He bears the burden of our sin, and is scorched by the flames of hell for you. He is homo-sacrificium – the one who is at the core, driven by sacrifice. Driven by love for you. Driven by grace. Driven to the cross where He gives up his \$10; He gives up everything, to give it all to you.

So He speaks to the life-long Lutheran, “I am good and I give what is right. To you I give eternal life and nothing less. Stop trying to bear the burden of the day for me, and let me bear it for you. Labor for me and labor in me, knowing that your labor is not in vain. For by grace you have been saved.”

So He speaks to the girl who is now a woman thrice divorced, “I am good and I give what is right. To you I give eternal life and nothing less. Stop trying to bear the burden of the day for me, and let me bear it for you. Labor for me and labor in me, knowing that your labor is not in vain. For by grace you have been saved.”

So He speaks to the drug addict who is now on his deathbed in a nursing home, “I am good and I give what is right. To you I give eternal life and nothing less. Stop trying to

bear the burden of the day for me, and let me bear it for you. Labor for me and labor in me, knowing that your labor is not in vain. For by grace you have been saved.”

So He speaks to you, “I am good and I give what is right. To you I give eternal life and nothing less. Stop trying to bear the burden of the day for me, and let me bear it for you. Labor for me and labor in me, knowing that your labor is not in vain. For by grace you have been saved.”

And what he gives you is equal. It is equal, not just to what all other believers receive, but is equal to what He receives. That is, in equal measure, Christ gives you what He has received from God the Father. For the Son of Man will be betrayed, condemned, delivered, and crucified. And the third day He will rise again.”

In equal measure, Christ gives you His own resurrection and the blessings of an eternal harvest. This day's wage is so far beyond anything we have deserved or could imagine. For the psalm says, “You are My Son, today I have begotten you.” Today is eternal in Christ and it brings with it His resurrection. You are alive; you are eternal; you are a new creation; and on the last day all this will become fully yours. Your body like His will rise to new life; the body which is bruised and burnt from bearing the burden of the day is restored to something new; the life which is damaged by wanderings, divorce, idleness, loneliness, is restored to something new; the relationship which has been broken, the hurt, the lying, the stealing, the murder, the rivalry we have waged with God is buried with Christ and you are raised with His resurrection to something new.

Each of us, in the end, are eleventh hour Christians. We have wasted so much, but are given so much more. No longer are we homo-rivalis, we are homo-sacrificium – the one who is at the core, driven by sacrifice. Driven by love for others. Driven by grace.

And now the end of the day draws to near. The signs are all around and it is a time to labor. The marketplace is filled with idle souls; wandering, alone, worried about what this last hour will bring. And God is calling. Through you, God is calling, 6:00 ... 9:00 ... noon ... 3:00 ... 5:00 – calling, calling, calling, choosing, calling to repent, calling all His people to get to work; to reach out to those who are idle and give them what you've been given: a day's wage in Christ, an eternal day in the harvest of the new creation – For the last will be first and the first last and by grace are you saved through faith in Christ: This is right in God's eyes. And this is how we look at the world too.

