

**Goal: That the hearers would more greatly rejoice in God's grace.**

Where do you tend to focus most of your attention: is it on those things that you do have, or on what you don't have? If you're like most, it's on what you don't have. We do it with **things**, like cell phones, TVs, computers, and cars. Yeah, what I have is fine, but I'd *really* be happier if I had one of those new, bigger, more efficient, faster ones! We do it with **people**. We have friends, but maybe not the right friends, who can get us ahead or accepted in the right crowds. Or yeah, I have a good spouse, but why can't he or she be more like...them? And sometimes we even do it with **churches**. Why can't my church be more like that church, with a nice building, a beautiful organ, an amazing band, or with no issues or problems?

Now sometimes, wanting something nicer or newer isn't wrong. *Spouses excluded!* The problem is the mindset. Because when we focus frequently on what we don't have instead of what we do, it leads to discontent. And instead of rejoicing in the goodness and generosity of our heavenly Father who has abundantly blessed us and given us so much, we become like the workers in Jesus parable today. We look at what others have been given and get upset, jealous, even angry. Both at them and God. And then not only does our love for our neighbor fail, so does our faith in God, as we accuse Him of not being fair, or not giving us our due.

Now, it's tempting to blame advertising or the entertainment industry or even the government which has given us "clunker" cash for newer cars, LED lightbulbs, High Definition flatscreen TV's, Smartphones, and 3D movies, feeding our appetites for more. But its not their fault. They're simply feeding what's already inside us. The mindset created by Satan from the very beginning when he got Adam and Eve to be dissatisfied with Paradise. Instead of focusing on all they had, they focused on the one and only thing God had not given them to eat. And they said: that's not right. God is wrong. And their sinful self-absorption took what wasn't good for them, and we've been following in their footsteps ever since.

Now, consider the parable this morning. Think how happy those fellows called to work in the vineyard were at the beginning of the day. Especially when we see so many unemployed in our nation today. Think how happy they were to have good and useful work to do. How happy to have the promise of a day's pay at the end, and go home with the satisfaction of a job well done. How happy they were...*until* the master had to screw it up by going out and hiring more laborers later. Then having the audacity to pay them exactly the same at the end of the day! Suddenly, all that happiness and contentment flew out the windows of their souls, as they thought: *that's not*

right. *The master is wrong.*

But that's the way the Lord works. As He speaks through Isaiah: ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”*** (***“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. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”***) (Isaiah 55: 7 – 9) The Lord doesn't operate by the rules and ways of this world. Because the rules and ways of the world are of the Law, getting what you deserve and what you've earned. But the way of the Lord is the Gospel, the way of gifts and grace. And in this way the Lord is exceedingly gracious and abundant, always giving more than we ever deserve.

Sometimes, or often times, we have a problem with that, don't we? And not just on the physical side of things, but on the spiritual. We often think that our length of membership in the church or our tithing should merit us some extra pull and benefits. But that is the way of the world and the Law, not the way of the Lord and His grace. The fact is that we're all simply workers who have been called by God to work in the same vineyard, receiving the same promise, and the same hope through the same Savior.

One example of this is death bed conversions, when a criminal who has done all kinds of evil things in his life confesses Christ right before the he receives his lethal injection. What do we often think? *Isn't that convenient?* Does he think a lifetime of evil can be made up for so easily at the end? And if we're told that person, who was called by our Lord to His vineyard at the last *minute* of the day will receive the very same gift of heaven as us, we don't like it, one bit. *That's not right. God is wrong.* To which Jesus answers us: ***“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?”*** (Matthew 20: 15)

So we need to repent. To repent of our wrong thinking and our rejecting the gifts of God. Yeah, I said *our* rejecting. If we think someone doesn't deserve the gift of God, then we're thinking we do, and we've turned God's gifts into obligations, based on what I think I've earned and therefore what He owes me. Or at least that He owes me more than what He gives to them.

But what does God owe us? Seriously? I think it's safe for me to assume that most of us aren't lifelong criminals deserving of death, but maybe we're worse, because we know better. We regularly and routinely receive our Lord's forgiveness, yet we still go out and live the same

old life of sin? Our anger unabated, our lusts insatiable, our pride overflowing, our care and concern focused mostly on ourselves, and our love for others running cold, except when we think we can get something from them. What exactly do we think God owes us?

In God's eyes, none of us are any different from that criminal on death row. So every week we come here and have a deathbed conversion. That's what repentance and confession is you know. We repent from our deathbed of sin, pleading, *"Jesus, have mercy on me, a poor, miserable sinner. Don't give me what I deserve, but what I don't deserve. Forgive me and give me the gift of eternal life, instead of the wages of eternal death I've earned."* And our Lord, who doesn't give as we give, does just that. And He can, because He allowed Himself to be nailed to the instrument of death called the cross, and took our death sentence. That His death would mean life for us. His condemnation would mean forgiveness for us. He took upon Himself God's justice and wrath against sin for us so that we wouldn't get what we deserve, but exactly what we don't. That being life in the forgiveness of our sins. That's why Jesus came, so that He might give us life abundant and generous! (***"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."***) (John 10: 9 – 11)

And if Jesus has given us that gift, can we begrudge it to another? *Is Jesus really being more generous with them than with us?* Than with us who have received adoption in those Baptismal waters? Than with us who have received His lavish forgiveness here all our lives? Than with us who have feasted at our Lord's table week after week? Than with us who have been given a life of faith, hope, and love? Than with us who have lived in the pasture of the Good Shepherd and in the safety and security of His fold? Than with us who have had the privilege of prayer and the confidence of our Lord's promises? Than with us who through God's Word see His hand at work in this world? Than with us who are able to come to our Lord's house every week and be with Him? Do we really think those who come at the end are receiving *more* than us? What more could Jesus give us than what He has already given us?

No. There is nothing your Lord is withholding from you. All that He is and all that He has is yours in Jesus. He simply calls you to come and accept one another. Early or late, young or old. Come and receive His gifts for all. Come and rejoice in His goodness and generosity. Come in good times and in bad. Come and share with all the Lord's abundant gifts of life. Amen.