**Welcome to the Vineyard**

Based on [Matthew 20:1-16](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt20.1-16)

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Septuagesima

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Today’s gospel is a powerful illustration about the central article of the Christian religion: justification by grace alone, and that grace itself is a kingdom, here on earth, for those hired by God to work it.

Christianity is unique among other so-called religions of the world in its content. **It preaches about God who created all things, and who sent his only begotten son into the flesh to save our race, and who gives us his Holy Spirit to help us in this life as we prepare for eternal life.** This God has a Name, he has done great things throughout history that attest to His Glory and manifest his mercy for a people who were dead in their trespasses.

God chose a mediocre group of people to be his people and to bless the world by carrying **the lineage that would produce the savior Jesus Christ, who did mighty acts and wonders before conquering death and ascending to the throne of God to rule all creation**. That, and much more, includes the content of the Christian faith, more or less attested to in the essential creeds of Christianity.

However, our religion is unique among all others not only in its content, but also *in its form*. All other religions, even blasphemous derivatives of Christianity like Mormonism or Jehovah’s Witnesses, Islam or modern-day Judaism, are religions of works *in their form*. **Some Christian sects like the Roman Church, though they have the central content of Christianity, adopt a religion of works *in form*.** They teach that somehow man must--to some degree--earn or merit his way to fellowship with God, that God’s grace at most helps attain salvation, it doesn’t bestow it. Regardless of who their god is, they claim that certain people appease him unto salvation, and others just don’t qualify.

They claim that, by their own powers, each man must work his way to God based on his own abilities. **But the true religion is a religion of Grace.** Over against all others, true religion teaches that God chooses, blesses, and saves the elect, not because of anything in them, nor because of what they are able to accomplish in this life, but purely by grace, and grace alone.

Today’s parable is about a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Throughout the day he hires more and more workers. At the end of the day, the master calls the foreman to distribute the wages. **And each worker received the same wage regardless of the number of hours worked. But there is controversy.** Those who were hired first--who worked the longest--became disgruntled, not because they didn’t receive their promised wage, but because they thought they would receive more than they were promised.

They were promised a denarius, but they assumed the master was not being literal. After all, what if the work proves harder, what if they work longer, what if the strength of other laborers fails them and they have to bear their burdens too. In short, they agreed to a denarius, but a figurative one. **What they really agreed to in their hearts was a standard of fairness – equal work for equal pay, and unequal pay for unequal work, extra pay for extra work.** They figured that if others received a denarius, the value of their work should be appraised proportionately higher. And it isn’t necessarily about the money; it is about the credit, the status, the thought that the one who works longer is better and more deserving than the one who works less. It seems like the disgruntled workers would have been happy with a Denarius, so long as the eleventh hour workers received less. Such selfishness! At any rate, they concluded—with their grumbling—that the master was therefore unfair or unjust, because he didn’t heed to the standard proportionate pay for proportionate work.

God is not subject to any man-made standards of proportionality or equality. Because the true God operates by Grace, and grace requires freedom. For instance, if the government uses your taxes to help the poor, you are not counted gracious. You are not giving charity because you didn’t give freely, you were taxed and forced to give. So too, if God gives you what is owed, he is not being Gracious, but merely just. He is not acting freely, but according to a rule. To be gracious, he must give freely. So in looking to the meaning of this parable, we must consider, where is the grace? Where is the master, God, giving freely. It certainly cannot be in paying out the wages. Wages are owed. What did the master do that he didn’t have to, what did he do freely out of his own mercy?

But the real message is not the payment for the work, but if you will, the grace of employment. The gift is not the denarius, but the gift is the invitation into the vineyard to do vineyard work. As the master says to the eleventh hour workers, “why do you stand here idle all day? and they say “because no one has hired us”. The grace is in the hiring. The gift is the vineyard itself.

God hired you to work his vineyard when he sent someone to baptize you in His Holy Triune Name. You may receive a denarius or more or less while you work here, you may be baptized as an infant or on your deathbed, but you will receive what you were promised. But the gift was not the wages anyway, the gift was having been chosen to work in the vineyard, to be included in the vineyard, to be under the employment of the one true God, who will cast out none who come to him. That’s the gift.

Now, there are “attendant benefits,” to be sure, a clear conscience, the promise of resurrection and renewal, wisdom, patience, faith, hope and love…and in summary doing the good works you were made for, that God prepared for you beforehand. Beats the idleness of unemployment, and being the slave of your appetites…greed, lust, pride, hatred, malice, and as we see in the parable ...envy.

The business of the vineyard is God’s kingdom of grace on earth. So too, going to church to the sacraments to Christ the foreman, that is not going to work for the gift…that is the gift. And anyone who thinks that eternal bliss in heaven is the reward for going to church is going to be quite disgruntled. The church is heaven, the sacraments are eternal life because they give communion with Christ who says, “This is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent” (John 17:3).

Welcome to the vineyard: Welcome to the Church. when you leave here for the next six and a half days you carry the church with you. So carry the forgiveness of sins and live in it in the world. seek justice, fight oppression, help the helpless, until you return on the Lord’s Day to be equipped by grace and receive marching orders again. Do not grudge the vineyard, It is the grace of God for you. The body and blood of Christ are received by you to carry Christ forth into the world. And it is hard work, but there is no greater work environment

Here we know him while working, that is not earning our salvation, but bearing the cross of our salvation which is a sign opposed by the world. But when Christ comes again, the vineyard will become a paradise, wherein we will celebrate the wedding feast of the lamb in his kingdom. Because the vineyard is God’s kingdom of grace, seen only by faith in the present age, but in the age to come will be transfigured into the kingdom of glory.