Pentecost 18 Matthew 20:1-16
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What Do You Want from God?
I. Do you really want what you have earned?
II. Or would you rather have what God graciously offers you?

Dear Christian friends,

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," the Lord declared in the OT reading. Isn't that the TRUTH – **a truth** that at times can be so hard to accept. ***"My ways are not your ways"*** is especially true when it comes to OUR SALVATION and our personal relationship with God. Jesus illustrates just that with this parable.

These verses actually continue a conversation Jesus was having **with His disciples** in chapter 19. A rich young man had come to Jesus to FIND OUT what **he had to do** to get to heaven. This man was PRETTY SURE he had lived a **good enough** life UNTIL Jesus told him to **give away** all his money and **then come follow** Jesus. That was just asking TOO MUCH. **Rather than** give away all his money he WALKED AWAY from his Savior. That led Peter to exclaim, ***"We have left everything to follow You! What then will there be for us?"*** Jesus assured Peter that they wouldn't be SHORT-CHANGED but He also had to correct that WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME attitude that Peter **was voicing**. Selfishness **can destroy** a person's faith. So Jesus spoke this parable. **With it** Jesus asks each one of us – WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM GOD? 1)Do you really want what **you've earned** or 2)would you rather have what **God graciously offers** you?

I. Do you really want what you have earned?

This parable is about ***"the kingdom of heaven"*** – how God rules in people's hearts **through His Word**. At JUST THIS CRITICAL POINT it's so true that ***"God's way are not our ways."*** **With parables** Jesus uses something familiar from everyday life to illustrate a **spiritual truth**. This parable centers around a COMMON SIGHT in the Holy Land – a **vineyard**. This parable focuses on the WORKERS in that vineyard and their relationship with **the owner** of the vineyard.

The details are SIMPLE ENOUGH. Early in the morning – **probably around 6 a.m.** or so – the owner went out to hire some men to work in his vineyard. But BEFORE they would go work for him they had to hammer out a **contract**. FIRST THINGS FIRST, right? They FIRST wanted to know what he **would pay** them. ***"After agreeing to pay the workers a denarius for the day*** (the standard day's wage back then) ***he sent them into his vineyard."***

As the day progressed the owner kept going back to the ***"marketplace"*** and hired more men to work for him. He did that at **9:00** a.m. and again at **noon** and 3:00 p.m. Each time he SIMPLY TOLD these men, ***"I will pay you whatever is right"*** and off they went to work for him.

About an hour before QUITTING TIME – 5:00 p.m. – ***"he went out and found others standing unemployed. He said to them, 'Why have you stood here all day unemployed?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.'"*** There is NO NEED and certainly NO EXCUSE for **any one** of us to be standing around DOING NOTHING in God's kingdom. God graciously calls us to **faith in Jesus** and then He sends us to BE BUSY **for Jesus**. Paul compares the church to the **human body** with all its DIFFERENT MEMBERS. No one part of the body can DO EVERYTHING. But each part can DO SOMETHING. And if a part isn't doing **its job** the WHOLE BODY SUFFERS for it. Look what a toothache or **headache** can do to you. The tooth hurts but the WHOLE BODY PAYS for it.

It's the same way with the **church**. None of us can DO EVERYTHING but each one of us can **do something**. If some of us decide to NOT GET INVOLVED the whole congregation suffers for it. You may not have the voice to **sing in** a choir but there are other areas where you can HELP. Each one of

us has an IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION to make for the good of **God's** kingdom. If you don't think so come see me and we'll FIND A PLACE for you to help!

These men had their excuses for not working. ***"No one hired us."*** "No one ASKED ME to help." Whatever happened to VOLUNTEERING – to following **Isaiah's example** – ***"Here I am, send ME!"***

Just an HOUR AFTER **hiring** the last group of men the end of the **workday** came. The owner instructed the foreman to PAY the men but he was to ***"start with the last group and end with the first."*** THAT WAY the first hired would see what the **last hired** got paid.

What the **first hired** SAW got them thinking, "This is GREAT! Those guys who barely did any work are being PAID AS IF they had worked the **whole day**. We actually did work the **whole day** so we should BE IN FOR EVEN MORE than we had bargained for." ***"They thought they would receive more,"*** Jesus tells us, ***"but they each received a denarius too."*** They had bargained for a denarius and that's JUST WHAT they got paid. Were they ever TICKED OFF!

They had a right to be, didn't they? This WASN'T FAIR. ***"They began to grumble: 'Those who were last worked one hour, and you made them equal to us who have endured the burden of the day and the scorching heat!'"*** Do you see how that "WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?" **attitude** was affecting their view of everything? It was no longer a PRIVILEGE to work for this man but a BURDEN and a **bother**. Do we avoid getting involved at church **because we see** it as a PAIN and a WASTE of our time – we have other things – BETTER things - to do than work for the Lord and His kingdom? **Maybe** we were criticized in the past – we went unappreciated – we're TAKEN ADVANTAGE of. We ***"endured the burden of the day and the scorching heat"*** and look what we got out of it! What DO YOU WANT from God?

When these **first-hired workers** started grumbling the owner answered them, ***"I'm not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go"*** – GET OUT of here.

Let's do some arithmetic here. **What** have we REALLY EARNED – what does God REALLY OWE us? **How** hard a worker have you been **in God's vineyard** – how faithful a **servant**? HOW GOOD A JOB are you doing as a CHRISTIAN spouse – parent – **son** or daughter? You can double check GOD'S JOB DESCRIPTIONS for that in the 4th and 6th Commandments. How good a job are you doing PUTTING GOD FIRST in your life – AHEAD of yourself – your **job** – **sports**, etc.? **How good a job** are you doing BEING FAITHFUL in worship and prayer **as God defines** it in Commandments 1-3? **How good a job** are you doing being a GOOD NEIGHBOR as God defines it in Commandments 5-10? Those commandments are really a TYPICAL BUSINESS CONTRACT – "You do this for me and I'll do this for you." "**You** perfectly obey Me," **God says**, "and I'll take you to heaven when you die." If we DON'T FULFILL our part of the bargain – if we DON'T LIVE UP to **what we're supposed** to do – then listen again to the TERMS. Oh, and this is not hidden in some FINE PRINT. ***"Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law. The WAGES*** (paycheck!) ***of sin is death."*** If we're not going **to heaven** then we're heading to hell. WE haven't lived up to **our part** of the bargain. Do we really want what we've EARNED from God?

It's awfully dangerous – it's DOWNRIGHT STUPID – to start thinking, "God, YOU OWE me." There's no room for a CHIP ON our shoulders **in our relationship** with God. When you get right down to it God DOESN'T OWE us anything for worshiping and **obeying** Him. AS CREATURES we owe God our **worship** and **total obedience**. Jesus teaches us to say, ***"We are unworthy servants; we have only done that which was our duty."***

II. Would you rather have what God graciously offers you?

What DO YOU WANT from God? Wouldn't you rather have what **God graciously offers** us? This whole incident SEEMS UNREAL. This is not the way it is in the REAL WORLD. Getting paid for WORK

YOU DIDN'T DO? Getting the credit for what SOMEONE ELSE did? Doesn't that sound familiar? Isn't that AT THE VERY HEART of the gospel and our relationship with God? God graciously gives us ALL THE CREDIT **for what Jesus** all did **in our place** – His sinless life – His innocent sufferings and death on the cross. **This parable** is meant to show that grace is **just that** – TOTALLY UNDESERVED. **In grace** God gives us the EXACT OPPOSITE of what we had **earned/deserved**. **In grace** God forgives all our sins because Jesus fully paid for them all on the cross. **In grace** God promises us eternal life in heaven because Jesus perfectly obeyed all the commandments for us.

This seems so unreal yet is THE REALITY of **God's grace**. Listen again to the owner. ***"I WANT TO GIVE to the last one hired the same as I also gave to you."*** In pure grace God WANTS TO SAVE us – God WANTS US to spend eternity with Him in heaven. So **in pure grace** God sent us Jesus TO WORK OUT **our salvation** with His holy life and bloody death. Nobody forced God to do that. ***"Can't I do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"*** It's because of God's GRACIOUS GENEROSITY **in Jesus** that we today enjoy His forgiveness of all our sins and confidently look forward to **going straight** to heaven when we die.

That same grace gives us NEW HEARTS and a NEW ATTITUDE toward working **in God's kingdom**. Serving our Savior is NOT A CHORE or a **bother**. It's a PRIVILEGE. Serving Jesus and His people **is not** a "WHAT'S IN IT for me?" but a "LOOK WHAT GOD **has all done** for me!" **Serving Jesus** is not about what's RIGHT and **fair** but about God's GRACE and generosity.

"God's ways are not our ways" – and thank God for that! Now that gracious God says to EACH ONE of us, ***"You also go and work in My vineyard and I will pay you what is right."*** Amen.

APOSTLES' CREED