**Notes for Next Sunday**

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 55:6-9

**6﻿ Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ﻿7﻿ Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ﻿8﻿ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ﻿9﻿ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

*V. 6 Seek the Lord.* This phrase is proclaimed in the context of the invitation to all who thirst for God (v 1). The call is urgent, for salvation is available now. It is saying “Now, at this present moment, you Israel, are given the offer of salvation, God is turning toward you. He can be found now, now he is near.

*V. 6 He is near*. God is where His Word is and when we hear or read it, we are in His presence.

*V. 7 He will freely pardon*. God’s mercy and pardon are given “freely” as gifts, not based on human repentance, but on God’s mercy.

*VV 8-9*. God calls us to live by faith, not by sight. His plans and reasons are beyond the comprehension of mortal man. We seek revenge to get even, but Jesus offers forgiveness and love. We hold grudges and withhold grace, but God takes no pleasure in being vindictive and delights when the wicked repent and live. These Gospel gifts are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. (CC)

GOSPEL – Matthew 20:1-16

“**For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ﻿2﻿ He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ﻿3﻿ “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ﻿4﻿ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ﻿5﻿ So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ﻿6﻿ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ﻿7﻿ ”‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ ﻿8﻿ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ ﻿9﻿ “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ﻿10﻿ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ﻿11﻿ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ﻿12﻿ ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ﻿13﻿ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ﻿14﻿ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ﻿15﻿ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ﻿16﻿ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”**

Jesus’ parable will explain why there are many first ones who will be last and last ones who will be first (19:30; also 20:16). This parable, the second longest one in the Gospel of Matthew, is a wonderful and suspenseful story. It is carefully crafted to reveal that in the most important way all disciples are equal in the present and future reign of God in Jesus. The story exhibits a simple overall structure of two parts. In 20:1-7, Jesus tells of a householder who goes out five times during the day to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. In 20:8-15, the laborers come at the end of the day to receive their wages. The ensuing conversation between the vineyard lord and the group hired first provides both a corrective warning and a blessed promise to all Jesus’ disciples, then and now, as we wait for the final day of reckoning. The parable closes (20:16) when Jesus reverses the statement of 19:30. The parable’s message is simple but profound: God treats all those who are workers in the reign of heaven the same; owing to God’s grace, there is no distinction on the Last Day. (CC)

*V. 1 Kingdom of heaven.* Here it is the Kingdom of grace, the visible church on earth, which will be consummated in the Kingdom of glory, v 8.

*V. 2 Agreed.* This is merely stressing the fact that the workers clearly understood the arrangement. They did not complain at this point.

*V. 3 Marketplace.* The city gates were the places in which public business was conducted, contracts executed, legal judgments handed down, and government administered (Gen 23; Dt 22:15). (TLSB)

V. 6 The landowner takes the initiative and hires men at about five P.M. This is unheard of, and purposely so, for Jesus is speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of grace on earth.

*V. 8 Evening came.* This is a prophetic allusion to the Last Judgment. The evening of each individual’s life resembles the evening of the world.

*V. 14 Take your pay.* This has the meaning of a gift, based on grace, not merit.

*V. 15 Do I not have a right.* The master’s decision to be generous with those hired last does not mean he has shortchanged those hired first, On the contrary, those hired first receive the wage mutually agreed upon. Being part of God’s kingdom is not based on earning or deserving anything but rather on grace. (TLSB)

The parable’s primary message, then, is one that takes a community and its members and places them all on the same level. There is no room for self-promotion, no occasion for competition, no basis on which one disciple can say to another, “I have no need of you” or “I am more important than you are.” Even the unique apostles, who on the Last Day will sit on thrones as they judge the twelve tribes (19:28), are, in final and ultimate terms, simply laborers in the vineyard like every other baptized believer in Jesus. (CC)

*V. 16 last first…first last.* In a time and culture in which relative social status played an extremely prominent role, this parable was revolutionary. In our modern time and culture, in which sinful disciples still want to (or think that they must) compare and evaluate so that someone comes out on top and someone else falls to the bottom, Jesus’ conclusion undercuts all prideful superiority and eases all fearful inferiority: “in this way, the last ones will be first ones, and the first one (will be) last ones.” (CC)