

BY GRACE ALONE

January 31, 2010

Rev. Bernt P. Tweit

Old Testament Lesson; Exodus 17:1-7

Epistle Lesson; 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5

Sermon Text; Matthew 20:1-16

With the scripture readings we have been following in previous years, the Epiphany Season takes us directly into the Lenten Season. Transfiguration Sunday becomes a bridge between Epiphany and Lent. This year, as we are looking at the Historic Series of Readings, there are three Sundays that bridge the Epiphany Season with the Lenten Season. On the front of our worship guide for today you see the theme for today's sermon and service in quotations, "By Grace Alone". You see it also tells us the time of year we are in, which is the week of January 31st. Then you see that odd looking Latin word there. It is *Septuagesima*. That word simply means **70**. Next week, you are going to see another word on the worship guide, which is going to be *Sexagesima*. That word means **60**. And two weeks from today, (which happens to be Valentine's Day), on the bulletin it will say *Quinquagesima*, which means **50**. What those words simply mean is this. Today we are about, 70 days away from Easter. Next Sunday we will be roughly 60 days away from Easter. And, on February 14th, we will be roughly, 50 days away from Easter.

Consider these next three Sundays to be a little preview into the Lenten Season. One way to consider that is thinking about your coming to church, this morning. Before you came into church, you had to enter in through the Narthex. Right now, before we enter into

the Lenten Season, we are in that pre-Lenten Season or that 'Narthex Season'. Or another way to consider it is this way. Some of you, next Sunday will watch the Super Bowl. Some of you, before watching the Super Bowl, are going to watch the Pre-Game Show. It is not the Super Bowl, itself, but it is leading into the Super Bowl. That is what these next three Sundays are like. It is like the Pre-Game Show, leading into Lent.

Well, during these three Sundays, what we are going to be focusing on is three of the *solas* talked about in the Bible. (The word sola means only or alone.) Today, we will focus on *Sola Gratia, grace alone*. Next Sunday, *Sola Scriptura, scripture alone*. Two weeks from today, we will look at *Sola Fide, faith alone*.

Today we hear Jesus share with us the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Remember, a parable is an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning. Jesus told this parable, because of something that had happened right prior to our text. There was a rich, young ruler who came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "Keep the commandments."

That rich, young ruler said, "I have kept all of the commandments." So, Jesus told him to go and sell all of his possessions. Give them to the poor and then come and follow Him. The Bible tells us that rich, young ruler went away sad, because of his great wealth. When that man left, Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to inherit eternal life."

The disciples then asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus said to them, "With man, this is impossible." Jesus then went on to say,

"With God all things are possible."

Peter then asked, "*What will there then be for us? We have given up everything. We have come and followed you. What will there be for us? What is our reward?*"

Jesus then shared this parable. There was an owner of a vineyard,

who, when the time was right, went out and got workers to work in his vineyard. At 6:00 in the morning, he went to the labor ready place, where the people were standing around, waiting for work. He asked them to come and work in his vineyard. They agreed on a salary. They agreed on a wage, a denarius, which was a fair day's wage. And they went and worked in his vineyard.

At 9:00 in the morning, at noon, at 3:00 in afternoon, and at 5:00 in the afternoon the landowner went back to that labor ready place. Each time he found people to come and work in his vineyard. He promised them, "I will pay you whatever is right."

At 6:00 in the evening, when the twelve-hour workday was over, the landowner told the foreman to have everybody line up, from those who were hired last, to those who were hired first, to give them their wage, or their salary. Those who were hired at 5:00 p.m., and had worked just one hour, received a whole day's wage. They received a denarius. The same thing happened with those who were hired at 3:00, at noon, and at 9:00 in the morning. Those who were hired at 6:00 in the morning were thinking to themselves, "*We are going to receive more*", but when they put out their hand to get their pay, they also received a denarius. Remember, that is what they had agreed to work for.

And what did they do? They began to grumble and complain.

-It reminds me of our Old Testament Lesson for today, when the Children of Israel were in the wilderness, in the desert. There wasn't any water, so what did they do? They grumbled and complained against Moses, and against God.

-Today, in a preschool or kindergarten setting, oftentimes what those young children need to learn is not to be envious or jealous of what other people have. Maybe the most common word spoken of, early on in a school year, in the preschool is "That is mine."

Children, at that age, need to learn to share, need to learn to cooperate. Even in preschool, early on in the year, just standing in

line is something that needs to be learned, and not to 'cut in line'.

-With our grade school youth, and with our high school students, how often do you grumble and complain with, if your friends cell phone is nicer than yours is, or if they have a MP3 player that is nicer than yours is? I just saw one of my middle school youth, here say, "Well, I don't even have a cell phone!" Jealous, envious of those who have something that we do not.

-I have heard adults grumble and complain recently, because of an NBA basketball player and what happened to him. You may have heard of Gilbert Arenas, a basketball player for the Washington Wizards. He was recently suspended for the entire season, because he brought some guns into the locker room. I don't know what the entire amount of his suspension will be from a dollar figure perspective, but I did hear this figure. For every game that he was suspended, he is losing \$147,200.00. I have heard some adults grumble and complain saying, "It takes me two to three years to make the money that he makes in just one game. And, he threw that away, because of his suspension."

-Studies have been done with those who have won the lottery. At first, family members are really excited, when somebody in their family wins the lottery. But, as time goes by, brothers and sisters, first cousins, those who are even distantly related in the family, become envious and jealous, because they want a part of the winnings.

-Grumbling can even be worse in the church. Sometimes people may say, "I have been Lutheran all of my life. And now, there are people who are coming to church and are parking in my parking spot. There are people who are coming to church who are sitting in the place where I sit in the pew." We begin to grumble and complain about those who are newer in the faith.

The point of the parable Jesus spoke today of the laborers in the vineyard is this. He is pointing us to God's love and His grace. We

are saved, because of God's love and grace, not because of what we think is fair. Consider those who were hired at 6:00 in the morning. That is equivalent to those of you who were baptized when you were babies. That is when you came to faith to believe in Jesus as your Savior. Some of you, maybe, came to faith when you were in grade school or high school. That is equivalent to being hired at 9:00 in the morning. Or, maybe it was the middle of your life that you came to faith, the equivalent of being hired at noon. Or, maybe it was later in life you have come to faith, the equivalent of being hired at 3:00 p.m. There are some people who even come to faith on their deathbed, at the 11th hour of their life. What is the reward, or the gift God gives to those, whether they came to faith as an infant, or at the 11th hour of their life?

The gift is the same.

It is eternal life with Him in Heaven.

Praise God we don't get what we deserve. What we deserve is eternal separation from God in Hell, because of our grumbling, our complaining, and because of our sin.

It was Jesus, our Savior, who worked, we might say, 'during the heat of the day'. He worked 'during the burden of the day'. Jesus received what you and I deserve.

-Because of our grumbling and complaining, Jesus was mocked.

-Because of our grumbling and complaining, Jesus was beaten.

-Because of our grumbling and complaining, Jesus died on a cross.

And then, praise God, we receive what we don't deserve. What we have received is that precious gift of everlasting life, with Him in Heaven.

We are saved by grace alone.

When I was a youth, my pastor, Pastor Richard Newgard, was my confirmation instructor. One of the things I remember from his

classes is the definition he gave for this word we are focusing on this morning, the word *grace*. You have probably heard me share this with you before. He simply took the word grace and he made it into a small sentence that was very easy for us to understand. He said, “Dear youth. This is what grace is. It is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense.**” What that means is God has given to you the riches of eternal life with Him in Heaven. It has come to you at the expense that our Savior, Jesus, went through for you. Jesus was mocked for you. He was beaten for you. And, He died on the cross for you. That was the expense that our Savior, Jesus, went through so you and I can have those riches of everlasting life, with Him in Heaven. Praise God that we are saved, not by what we think is fair, but rather, praise God that **we are saved by grace alone.** Amen.

**God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense**