

Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
January 27, 2013

### ENVY NOT IN THE KINGDOM!

*Keep me ever mindful, Lord, that it is only by grace that I have been included in Your Kingdom and am privileged to serve in it. Amen. Septuagesima Sunday Matthew 20:1-16*

Today's lesson takes us from the vistas of mountain-top glory of the Transfiguration into the middle of Our Lord's Passion week. How soon does our Lord return to battle. He hardly gets down from the mountain and He casts out demons. He sets his face towards Jerusalem. He beckons us to follow and prepare in this "Gesima" season of the Church year to thrust ourselves into it, wading so to speak, before entering the depths of our Lenten struggles.

In baptism we are called to follow. We are to follow him in life and in death to life everlasting.

Did you not know, explained Paul, ...that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

We're called to be a "cut above the rest". We who are the baptized are called to holiness and "newness of life". It comes with difficulties. Did you not know, explained Jesus, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they **persecuted me**, they will also **persecute you**. If you do not sense a true struggle. If you don't feel the weight of your cross. I suggest that you aren't holding it high enough.

When Christ calls a man he bids him to come and die. We are to enter into the sacrificial life of His Church. It is His Vineyard. And it is a privilege to serve in her. In our baptism and specific calling within the life of the church we have purpose and meaning and the suffering Christ in the midst of us. What rewards even in the here and now.

And imagine this, blessing upon blessing. Some have, as the prophet Jeremiah, John the Baptist and even Timothy, been called from their youth and even infancy. I think that those who maintain that we must somehow reach an age of reason (age 7, 12, 21) no one really knows, before he can decide for Christ and all that must somehow be denying the reality that some are called from infancy to serve the Lord.

And many of you have had the good fortune to be baptized as infants even days old, entering into the Vineyard. Furthermore you might even be able to say that you come from a long line of Christians who served the Lord also. Some even long lines of Reformation Christians. And we might recall family histories of suffering connected with such a path. Jesus tells an apprehensive Peter that the work of the apostles will not be forgotten. "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters of father or mother or wife or children or lands for My name's sake shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life. But be

warned, Jesus explains. Don't risk losing it all. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first". The *sin of envy* has a way of entering into the Kingdom which is the Church.

As the heat of the day intensifies, and the noon day sun parches your spiritual life, you look up and see men and women fresh from the worldly marketplace entering into Vineyard, picking up their hoe to labour alongside you. Time marches on. Your hair turns grey then white. Your spiritual vigor remains but the body tells of its limitations.

And still they come in. Even in the winter of your life they enter in during the 11<sup>th</sup> hour until you see even those like the thief of the cross, making their confession in what truly is, the nick of time. And they stand beside you scarcely lifting the proverbial sickle even once before the Judgment Day.

And the whole time choirs of angels "rejoice over the one sinner who repents" but you instead succumb to that sinful attitude of this world. You cry out with Peter "What then will there be for us?" And you look at them and question. How can they enter? I've been working, toiling and sweating since infancy and my youth and now suddenly in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour they think they can work beside me just one hour and be here! Satan wants you to cry out with moaning. He wants you to become consumed with that murmuring of an Israelite against Moses. "Life, is not fair!" "Now even in the Kingdom, the spiritual life is not fair!" But is it the question of fairness we should become consumed with or is it rather the wonder at God's generosity?

The local church, even this church, can be become rife with such attitudes. We see new immigrants come into the Church from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. How dare they enter and think they are equal to us who have been Lutherans for generations. We see a guy at the congregational assembly stand up and he signed on just the meeting before. How dare he think he's equal here? I've been a voter for 20 years now doesn't that count for something. Add up my offerings and his. There be no comparison. Yes there are members we say. But then, there are members.

The early Church knew such struggles. Today's parable is set against the backdrop of increasing tensions between an emerging Church consisting of those of established Jewish and those of an upstart Gentile background. And I can assure you that those of the establishment, whose ancestors who were of the people of God for generations, tracing their lineage back to Abraham himself were resentful of the Gentile converts who seemed to have jumped on board at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour.

But Jesus gives stern warnings to them all, even as words of warning are sounded by his apostles such as St. Paul who says, "Know that it is by grace that you have been saved and not of your works lest any man should boast. The reward of eternal life. The rewards that come with the good works you are able to do. Everything is a reward by God's grace. And in none of this reward can you relish in your own efforts.

Neither can you judge another. Can you test the value of his works? We all enter in those doors by grace and God's grace alone. And then, as God gives us strength, we might do good works that indeed, even as Scripture tells us "follow after us" and are never forgotten but rewarded. But all these things

are rewards by God's grace. We might receive "a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" as 19:29 teaches but it's all ultimately by God's grace.

Beware. Listen carefully. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first". It doesn't need to happen that way. Keep your hand to the plough. Keep striving and struggling in the faith. Do not consider whether the 11<sup>th</sup> hour Christian beside you is getting the better end of the bargain. Remember he was in the marketplace of the world where there was even more suffering. Rejoice in his salvation. Encourage him. Work together. Envy not. Do not even consider your works and your rewards. And in such paradoxical fashion, thinking yourself last, you may become first.

May such attitudes of envy be cast away even here and now in this place and for every Christian.

May our opening prayer therefore also be our closing one.

*Keep me ever mindful, Lord, that it is only by grace that I have been included in Your Kingdom and am privileged to serve in it. Amen.*

Amen.