

18 September 2011  
Pentecost 14

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“100% Jesus”

Text: Matthew 20:1-16 (Isaiah 55:6-9; Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I read the Holy Gospel for today, I thought of professional athletes. In particular, those who sign a contract to get paid so much - usually a lot! - but then a couple of years later, when they find out someone else is getting more, they want to re-negotiate. They want a new contract. They want more. They want their fair share.

Now, for some athletes, this is perhaps warranted. They've turned out better than expected, are one of the top performers, and deserve more. Others, maybe not. But it is all built on performance. I'm better, I should get more. I've been here longer, I should get more. It's only right. It's only fair.

And so the parable we heard today. At the beginning of the day, the workers who agreed to a contract with the owner of the vineyard were happy with their agreement; but by the end of the day, they wanted to re-negotiate. Something wasn't right. Why were these others getting the same as them? They worked longer, they should get more. They worked harder, they should get more. They want their fair share.

And you know what? *You agree*. That's what makes this parable so hard! Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of God, and God's graciousness and overflowing generosity, and that all He calls into His kingdom, whether at the first hour or at the eleventh hour, get the same reward - an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven by grace through faith. And you know that's true and you're even glad that's true. *And yet . . .* and yet still this parable rubs you the wrong way, doesn't it? It's just somehow not right, that everybody should get the same. It's that little pebble in the bottom of the shoe of our Christian walk - it just doesn't feel right.

So let's stop and sit a spell today, and see if we can't get that pebble out.

And to do so, I want you to consider the words of the owner of the vineyard to those disgruntled workers, when he says: ***Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?*** Now, those last

words there are a bit of a paraphrase. The original puts it like this: *Or is your eye evil because I am good?* That gives us a bit more to work with here, especially because just a couple of weeks ago, we heard Jesus say: *And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire* (Matthew 18:9).

Now, usually - and as I talked about that in the sermon two weeks ago - we usually think of "our eyes causing us to sin" in terms of seeing things we should not see. And a common example of that are the sexually-charged images all around us in the world today - in movies, on TV, and in advertising - stirring up lustful and impure thoughts in our hearts. *And that's certainly true.* But here today, Jesus is, perhaps, giving us another way to think about that: that the "evil eye" we need to beware of is not just what goes *into* our eyes, but - in a sense - what comes *out* of them. How we look at other people. How we look at God. Do we give them, and God, an "evil eye?"

That's what those disgruntled workers in the vineyard were doing. They were giving an "evil eye" to the owner's generosity and their fellow workers' good fortune. And this "evil eye" *perhaps* caused them to resent their fellow workers, and *certainly* to resent the owner. He was wrong. He was unfair. He was . . . *evil*.

And that is the danger for you and me today. A *constant* danger. That we will look at **others** and their life and what they have received with an "evil eye," thinking them unworthy, magnifying their sin, and resenting the good they have received. Then that we will look at **ourselves**, and with an "evil eye" think more highly of ourselves than we ought, belittle our sins, and think that we have deserved better. And then that we will finally look at **God** with an "evil eye" and judge Him! That He is wrong. That He is unfair. That He is not giving as He should. That He is . . . not good.

You've thought that. I know you have. For that's what's behind all of our "why" questions. When we ask: *Why me, Lord?* when something bad happens to us. When we ask: *Why him and not me, Lord?* when something good happens for someone else. *Why did you do that, Lord?* Are there not judgments in those questions? An implication that something is not right, not fair, not deserved?

**And so we need to repent.** And learn to see with "good" eyes, God eyes, faith eyes, eyes that have been renewed by the Gospel. And it is not impossible to do so. For while what the prophet Isaiah says is true: ***that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are His ways our ways***, our Lord *has* given you His Word and Spirit, that you might know His thoughts and ways; that you know His goodness toward you, and learn to see with new eyes, good eyes, Gospel eyes.

Those eyes do not look at others and what they have. They do not look at ourselves and what we don't have. They don't look into heaven and try to figure out what God is doing and why. **Gospel eyes look to the cross.**

For there is where we see most of all that *God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways*. For there we see the one who truly **bore the burden of the work and the heat of the day**. There we see that with God there is no negotiating or re-negotiating, but the 100% unadulterated harshness of the Law, and the 100% pure sweetness of the Gospel. And that it cannot be any other way.

For nothing less than 100% will do for God. He demands 100% perfection from us, if we want to be in His kingdom. All perfect, all the time, no haggling. No 51% or 75% or even 90%. And from the heart, not just outwardly. No begrudging, no complaining, nothing less than 100% perfect love. From the first second of your life until the last. Otherwise you die. . . .

But this cold, hard 100% is then met with another. But this 100% quite different, for this is the 100% undeserved sweetness of the gift of God's forgiveness. That *for all who have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:23) - in other words: you! . . . and me - there is 100% of Jesus given to you. His perfect life, His perfect love, His perfect sacrifice on the cross for you in your place to take your sin and death and condemnation, that you might have 100% of His life and His kingdom. A forgiveness and life that is not just insurance for the future, but is a reality even now. To live in and grow in and cherish.

That's the 100% of Holy Baptism, where you're not just started on this life but given it and wrapped in it; where you're not just added to the list of those who maybe, sometime in the future, might become children of God, but made a child of God. 100%. Baptism is 100% Jesus. 100% sure.

And that's the 100% of Holy Absolution, where you're not just forgiven most of your sins but all of them; not just the ones you remember and confess, but even the ones you don't remember, and even the ones you struggle to repent of because the hurt and pain are so deep. Absolution is 100% Jesus. 100% sure.

And that's the 100% of Holy Communion, where you receive not just bread and wine, and not just a spiritual Jesus, but all of Jesus - the very Body and Blood that hung on the cross, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, now placed into your mouth as your spiritual food, for your life, for your salvation. Communion is 100% Jesus. 100% sure.

**So, now, would you still like to re-negotiate?** Do you still want God to measure how you've done and give you what you deserve? . . . I didn't think so. Far better

is to receive the gift, for whether you've been called at the beginning, in the middle, or near the end, gift it is. All gift, all goodness, all the time.

You know, it seems to me that if somebody had a gripe or a complaint, it was St. Paul. Sure, he started out on the wrong foot, as a persecutor of the church, but hadn't he made up for that by now? Being such a great missionary and all? But instead, he wound up in prison - in chains for preaching Jesus. 100% Jesus.

*But what did Paul say about that?* First he said: **what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.** Which is nice and good and important and all that; but our suffering for another's good - well, that's hard. And we grumble and complain about that, don't we? Even if we know it's for good.

So I think even more important is that Paul said this: ***I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.*** What is Paul saying there? That even though I really don't want this, and would rather not go through this, I need this. This is not just for the good of others, but for MY deliverance.

That's talking and believing 100% Jesus. That in good or in bad, in suffering or in glory, to know that Jesus is working for your good, for your salvation, doing what you need, when you need it, even if you cannot understand it. 100% Jesus. 100% goodness. 100% of the time.

And that's a promise, a covenant, a testament, sealed with His blood. So you can be 100% sure. So come now, again, in your sinful, grumbling flesh, and receive this gift. And be transformed by this gift. Be renewed by this gift. That 100% Jesus *for* you be 100% Jesus *in* you and working *through* you. Not better than anyone else, or more deserving than anyone else, but simply as those who have *tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him* (Psalm 34:8). Blessed indeed! In the One who was first of all and became last for us, that we who are last may be first.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.