

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY BEFORE LENT (SEPTUAGESIMA)

THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD



Cleanse my heart and my lips, Almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel. In the Name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Let me start by dealing with the unusual nature of this parable. Unusual, because the parable does not conform to the social practices of the day.

Firstly, the landowner goes out early to look for the workers to work on his vineyard. Normally the landowner would ask the manager to do this job for him.

Secondly, the workers are hired throughout the day (early, about the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour and the eleventh hour) instead of hiring them once in the morning so that they can work the whole day.

Thirdly, one would expect the landowner to pay the workers himself, instead he asked the manager to pay the workers.

Lastly the workers are paid in reverse!

Jesus Christ was indeed a great storyteller. When one reads the way the workers are paid, the expectation is built in the workers who were hired earlier in the day that they might receive more than those who were hired in the eleventh hour.

Jesus Christ wants to show that the landowner does things in his own way. Nobody tells him how to run his vineyard. My dear brothers and sisters, we have been invited to the vineyard of the Lord. The Lord has promised to pay us a denarius (approx. R30.00). We must be at peace with this fact, and if we accept this fact, we will live in a good relationship with ourselves, and more importantly, with the landowner of the vineyard. He is in charge. The message to us is that the landowner is in control. We must trust him.

Jesus Christ has promised us life to the full. John 10:10 "... *I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*" The workers who worked longer hours felt that they deserved more because they compared what was in their hands with those who came to work at the eleventh hour.

This is true in our workplace, we work hard hoping to get service bonus or a promotion, but instead those who are lazy and less experienced are often the ones who are promoted. When this happens, we become jealous and envious. We become angry and bitter because we think, they do not deserve it. We work harder and are more experienced than them.

This reminds me of a song sung by Hlengiwe Mhlaba called "*Count your Blessings*". The landowner gave us our pay (a denarius) as he promised. He gave us new life through his Son Jesus Christ. Instead of being content and looking at what is in our hands, we compare it with the pay of those who came at the eleventh hour. When we compare our blessings (pay) with others, we become sad and bitter. Some of us even resign from our jobs. By counting someone else's pay, we are unable to see our own, which is already in our hands. God continues to bless us every day, but we cannot see it because we are busy counting other's blessings.

When we do that it takes away our happiness and we become sad and bitter. Remember our call as Christians is a call to be happy not to be angry.

Many of us cannot say to God “Thank you” because we are blind to the blessings that God continues to give us. Hlengiwe sings: “*count your blessings, one by one.*” My dear brothers and sisters, we must learn to recognize Him in our daily lives, for in this way we will be able to notice his blessings and appreciate them. We need to be grateful for the pay he has promised, without complaint. I am sure in your lives you have seen people who are always ungrateful, even if you help them? This is because they think that they deserve your help. The workers could not thank the landowner because they believed that they deserved more. They had forgotten that the landowner found them idling.

There are many things that are happening in our church. Our church is growing here in Southern Africa and the whole of Africa. Of course, there are also some bad things that are happening, like losing our brothers to Covid-19, but we cannot dwell on the bad things. We should not compare ourselves with other churches; instead, we must focus on our own blessings. We do not deserve to be hired by the landowner, but He *has* hired us, and all we can say to Him is “*Thank you*”.

I know what I am saying is not easy and needs self-discipline. Naturally, we cannot help but to compare what is in our hands with those who joined us at the eleventh hour. Paul tells us that we need to focus on the Prize.

My prayer for you, is that you may be fulfilled in your ministries and your calling as Christians, and that your life may be filled with gratitude!

In the + name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.



SEPTUAGESIMA :



Septuagesima is the name for the ninth Sunday before Easter, the third before Ash Wednesday. The term is sometimes applied to the seventy days starting on Septuagesima Sunday and ending on the Saturday after Easter.

As you can see, the Season of Lent is almost upon us; a time of fasting and prayer, and a time of serious introspection and the addressing of the matter of sin in our lives.

ASH WEDNESDAY signals the start of Lent proper, but the preceding Sundays are used to urge the Believer to begin preparations for their Lenten Journey.

This year, in the midst of the current pandemic, we are more aware of our mortality than ever before. Sorrow and suffering surround us....what better thing than to fall on one's knees in humble penitence and pray for God's guidance and forgiveness?

