

Notes for Next Sunday

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 55:6-9). The Lord has prepared a victory feast (55:1-2) and has invited all to be incorporated into David's everlasting feast (55:3). The result is that the guests become his witnesses to the world (55:4-5). Deportees dare not drag their feet into this new life. "Seek the Lord while he allows himself to be found!" (55:6). This exhortation does not imply that hearers are able, on their own, to find The Lord. Nothing could be further from the truth! Caught in the sin of idolatry, the deportees are blind and deaf (42:19), stubborn rebels from birth (48:8), and they have no righteousness of their own (48:1). Those who search the Scriptures will find that they testify to Christ (Jn. 5:39). He is the Word incarnate and the new temple. Those who seek him in Scripture, Holy Baptism, and his Supper do find him. (CC)

Epistle (Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30). Paul turns his attention from the question of whether he will live or die to a more important issue: what it means to live in this world. If God grants you a day in this world, it is because He would have you serve others by living and speaking in a way that is consistent with (worthy of) the Gospel. Our ability to live this way is a product of the salvation God lavishes on us in the very words we read here and in the Spirit that accompanies those words.

Gospel (Matthew 20:1-16). Jesus' story will explain or ground why there are many first ones who will be last and last ones who will be first. This parable, the second longest one in the Gospel of Matthew, is a wonderful and suspenseful story, 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's message is simple but profound: God will treat 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)

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 55:6-9

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷Let 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.

55:7 wicked forsake. Though all are invited, there is no room in the kingdom of grace for those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways or for those who think only of their own righteousness and feel insulted by God's offer to "abundantly pardon" their sins. Let no one presume to come on his or her own terms, because none can comprehend God's ways and thoughts to save fallen mankind. (TLSB)

55:7 turn to the LORD... freely pardon. Done only by the Lord's Word, which accomplishes that which He purposes (cf v 11). (TLSB)

55:7 abundantly pardon. He will pardon and have mercy on every penitent sinner, no matter how much sin is "increased" (Rm 5:20). All others remain wicked and unrighteous in His sight. (TLSB)

55:8 *my thoughts are not your thoughts*. Human thoughts and thinking are dominated by the old nature and inevitably turn not to God, but to self and the satisfaction of human needs and wants. The answers to the problems of human life are not found in human reasoning, but in God's ways and thoughts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

55:9 *higher than your ways/thoughts*. God calls us to live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). His plans and reasons are beyond the comprehension of mortal man (e.g., Ps. 103:11; Job 38:1 40:2; Rom. 11:33-36). He settles accounts in such a strange way. We seek revenge to get even, but the Servant, despised and reviled (Is. 53:2-5), offers forgiveness and love. We hold grudges and withhold grace (see Gen. 27:41), but God takes no pleasure in being vindictive and delights when the wicked repent and live (see Ezek. 18:23). (CC)

EPISTLE – Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. ¹⁹ For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. ²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

1:12 now I want you to know. One of the primary reasons that Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians was to tell them how things were going for him in Rome. The Philippians were concerned about the apostle. They wondered what would happen to him, and they were concerned about the effect his imprisonment would have on the overall cause of the gospel. Would people continue to respond positively to a message whose best known and more eloquent advocate was now a prisoner of the state? (PBC)

1:13 clear ... chains for Christ. It has become apparent to all who know of Paul's situation that he is imprisoned, not because he is guilty of some crime, but on account of his stand for the gospel. (CSB)

1:13 whole palace guard. The mention of the palace guard (its official title was the Praetorian guard) would be of particular interest to the Philippian veterans. This well-known military company was a detachment of elite imperial troops, as the emperor's bodyguard. (PBC)

1:19 deliverance. Paul confessed that God's will and presence means that he will be saved. He did not yet know if "salvation" (deliverance) would mean release from prison or from life through martyrdom (delivered eternally). (TLSB)

1:20 my body. If Paul lived, his body would honor Jesus Christ, because the Gospel was proclaimed through him. If Paul died, he bore witness about life eternal that cannot be taken away. “It is God’s will and clear command that believers should do good works. The Holy Spirit works this in believers, and God is pleased with good works for Christ’s sake” (FC SD IV 38). (TLSB)

1:21 to live is Christ. Christ was the source and secret of Paul’s continual joy (even in prison), for Paul’s life found all its meaning in Christ. (CSB)

If you live as a Christian, you live by Christ’s grace, in His image, to serve as Christ the people around you. If you die, you learn the fullness of what you had known in part and your fallen human nature no longer hinders you. (TLSB)

1:23-24 depart and be with Christ ... remain in the body. Either alternative was a good one. While mysteries remain, this passage clearly teaches that when believers die they are with Christ, apart from the body. (CSB)

1:25 I will remain. The Philippian congregation was less than ten years old. Many of its members had only recently turned from idolatry. The congregation had its weaknesses and was surrounded by dangers. It was now suddenly deprived of its beloved apostle and his strong leadership and guidance, the congregation’s development could be seriously hindered. (PBC)

1:27 conduct yourself in a manner worthy. The root meaning of the verb Paul uses here is “exercise citizenship.” The Philippians, many of them Roman army veterans and their families, were especially proud of their Roman citizenship. The apostle wanted to remind them that as Christians they possessed a citizenship even more important than the earthly citizenship of which they were so proud. The Philippian believers were citizens of Jesus’ spiritual kingdom. As their conduct in so many ways gave evidence of their cherished Roman citizenship, it should, in even more ways, reflect their spiritual citizenship. (PBC)

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. ²He 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. ⁴He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶About 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. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When 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? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don’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.”

20:3-5 The three intermediate groups of workers recruited by the householder (at the third, sixth, and ninth hours) are entirely absent in the second half of the parable (20:8-15). Their chief function is to

create and build suspense about the wages that will be paid, for the householder promises this third middle group: “Whatever may be just I will give you.” (CC)

20:7 no one hired us. The answer does not denote irreverence but simply brings out their helplessness. But the landowner, in his utter generosity, takes the initiative, and engages their services.

20:7 you also go and work. Hiring these men to work only an hour was an act of charity, ensuring they would eat that day. (TLSB)

20:10-12 The expectation that those hired first would receive more seems reasonable. Recall, however, that they agreed to their denarius wage beforehand. (TLSB)

20:12 Bourne the burden of the work. Among those who have worked the longest we may find many proud and conceited persons, who rely on their long hours of work in the church and despise those who have worked but little, who insist on their rights, and are offended at the grace and goodness of God.

20:15 don't I 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)

20:16 first last...last first. The master's actions are stunningly unexpected. However, they are only insulting or hard to swallow if one takes one's eyes off of the owner. One can imagine the scene as the parable sets it up. Wages are paid out, beginning with the last group and ending with the first. As the first group stands in line and waits their turn, their gaze falters, leaving the master who has hired them, given them meaningful work, and promised them a fair wage. They stop looking at the master, and they start looking at their fellow workers. That's when they get into trouble. Their eye actually becomes evil because the master is good to others. (CC)