

Pastor B.J. Froiland
Septuagesima
Matthew 20:1-16
January 31st, 2010

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“Take what belongs to you and go.” The Lord God took the first man and put him in the garden to work it, to cultivate it, to keep it. All the trees, plants, and vegetation were his. All the land, animals, money, goods, and the like were put in his care. However, the first man Adam cultivated evil from the garden Eden, the very garden the Lord created for good. He ate fruit from the forbidden tree and planted the seed of death into all men. By eating of the fruit, Adam and Eve knew good and evil. In God’s mercy, He prohibited their eating from the tree of life, which would have sealed sin as their eternity. Adam and Eve were barred from paradise. The cherubim with a flaming sword guarded the way to tree of life. They left the garden with their sin. “Take what belongs to you and go.”

Adam and Eve went into the harsh world that their wickedness destroyed. Eve would face multiplied pain in child bearing and the desire to rule her husband. Adam would work the cursed ground in pain and sweat. He would return to the dust from which He came. All sons of Adam and daughters of Eve face the consequences of sin: grief, guilt, shame, death.

Welcome to your lineage: the transgressions which ruled the lives of Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, Saul, David, and Solomon also destroy your life. Have you been discontent with what God has given you or not given you? Have you considered God’s gifts to be a reward for your moral standing?

So Christ tells the parable of the laborers in the vineyard where those in this story who despise God’s grace are put to shame. The Master of the House went out early to hire His laborers. They labored from morning to evening. They labored from cradle to grave. The gracious Master gives the promised denarius. Some came later to work the vineyard, called by the Master, to be sure. They labored and received the same, a promised denarius. Some came at the very end toward the evening, near to the grave, yet also called by the master. They received the same denarius. It’s not right. It’s not fair. But God would have it no other way. This story is not about the labor and the hours worked. It’s only about the gracious Master. It’s only about Him and the gift He gives.

What does the Master say about His gift to the laborers? "Take what belongs to you and go." These words make the point clear. They cut through to the heart of the prideful worker who trusts in his efforts and skills. The prideful worker actually believes that his labor causes the denarius to come. He trusts in himself and not in the Gift and the Giver. He objects, "Am I not worthy of more than a denarius?" Paul Speratus, who penned today's hymn, sums up this error: "It was a false misleading dream that God His Law had given that sinners could themselves redeem and by their works gain heaven. The Law is but a mirror bright to bring the inbred sin to light that lurks within our nature."

But to the repentant sinner who pleads for God's mercy, these same words are eternal life: "Take what belongs to you and go." He knows that the reward is far greater than the labor; the work is incomparable to the Gift received. Therefore, rejoice you broken of heart! The Master has given you everything you need! Christ's righteousness belongs to you by His death on the cross. This righteousness comes to you in the most pure and obvious way today. "Take eat, this is My Body given for you." "Take, drink, this is My Blood, shed for you." Receive the denarius, yes the very foundation of faith: the Body and Blood of Jesus for you. No longer does the Master of the Vineyard stay closed away behind His hidden Majesty. Now He reveals Himself, in all His Glory, in the Host and Blood today. He took on your flesh, that He might give His Flesh and Blood to you forever. "Yet as the Law must be fulfilled or we must die despairing, Christ came and has God's anger stilled, our human nature sharing. He has for us the Law obeyed and thus the Father's vengeance stayed which over us impended."

The Father's just judgment is stayed and now you are free. The garden that was wrecked and ruined by sin is now supplanted by another Garden of Eden: God's Holy Church. In this Garden stands the greater Tree of Life: Christ, whose branches produce everlasting gifts. And just as Adam did not remain in the garden of earth forever, but was taken into the heavenly paradise of eternal life, so you also will not remain in the embattled church forever. God cultivates, weeds, and prunes His Church Militant through His Word that she might bear a bountiful crop in the Church Triumphant. The Lord will take you into His eternal heavenly paradise at His own time. When the evening of this world arrives, then follow the wages for the labor.

"Take what belongs to you and go." Go from this place, because you are free. "We, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life." We "... serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He has risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity." We are free to live in faith toward God and fervent love toward one another. "Faith clings to

Jesus' cross alone and rests in Him unceasing; and by its fruits true faith is known, with love and hope increasing. For faith alone can justify; works serve our neighbor and supply the proof that faith is living."

You are free to be the father who provides for and protects his family. You are free to be the mother who nurtures and cares for the household. You are free to be the son or daughter who honors their parents. You are free to be among the faithful who serves your neighbor selflessly. Christ has set you free. "Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Dearly Beloved, take what belongs to you and go. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

✠BJF✠