

BIBLE STUDY
September 14, 2020

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah 55: 6-9

Philippians 1: 20C-24, 27A

Matthew 20: 1-16A

1. Isaiah 55: 6-9

- We read a selection from this chapter on the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time when we read the Gospel of the Multiplication of the Loaves. The verses on that Sunday spoke about the universal invitation of God portrayed as a banquet for all.
- The chapter is a universal call to return to the Lord. The universal call demonstrates the mercy of God. God is generous in forgiving. Whereas human beings are restrictive and punitive, God is full of mercy and compassion. It makes no sense to human beings because God's ways are not our ways. God's ways are far superior to human ways.

2. Matthew 20: 1-16 A

- This parable lives up to the purpose of parables: to shock us into a new understanding about God. There is always a twist, a surprise in a parable that makes us look at things in a new way. This parable certainly does that!
- The owner of the vineyard goes out early in the morning to hire workers for the vineyard. They go to work and agree to work for the usual daily wage. The owner keeps going out throughout the day and hires those who are looking for work. At 5:00 PM, he goes out and hires those who are still there "because no one has hired them."
- At dusk, it is time to pay the workers. He will begin with those who started work last. They receive the usual daily wage. This builds up anticipation that those who worked all day long will receive more. However, they receive the same daily wage.
- Those who "bore the day's burden and the heat" complain that the owner is being unfair. In their opinion, they deserve more. The owner refutes them, saying that they agreed on the usual daily wage and that is what they got. He has done them no injustice. They are angry that he is being generous to the late-comers.
- The parable is being told to the religious authorities who complain that Jesus is welcoming tax collectors and sinners. He is offering salvation to those who are only lately converting as opposed to the Pharisees who have been observant of the law for their whole life.
- The Pharisees have a view of God which is based on God as a judge who administers justice severely. Jesus is challenging their view of God with a God of mercy and compassion who desires that all be saved.
- We might presume that those who are hired in the last hour have been lazy and don't want to work. They say the reason they are idle is that no

one has hired them. They want to work but cannot find work. They are certainly persistent in waiting the whole day to be hired.

- How would we feel if we had lived a good moral life making sacrifices to do what is right and when we got to heaven, saw a person who had done wrong all their life but made a death bed conversion? Would we feel cheated or would we embrace them and say, "I am so glad you made it!"
- How do you feel about a God who is so generous with forgiveness and mercy? Remember what Isaiah says, "My way are not your ways."
- A distinction is made today about equality and equity. Equality is when everyone has the same; equity is when everyone has the same opportunity. Some need extra opportunity to level the playing field.
- Parents love their children equally, but they are also may be aware that one child may need special attention or an extra hand. It does not lessen their love of the other children although the other siblings may feel that their parents have favorites.

3. Philippians 1: 20C-24, 27 A

- Paul writes this letter while he is in prison. He tells the Philippians that God has used his imprisonment for good because many have become emboldened in preaching because of his imprisonment.
- Paul remarks that some (probably rivals of Paul) preach the Gospel for less than noble reasons, for their own advancement or to embarrass him. Others preach out of good will. But, no matter what the motive, the Gospel is being preached.
- No matter his present circumstances, Paul will rejoice (a major theme of the letter) because he knows that God will make all things work out for good. He also depends upon and is grateful for the prayers and support of the people of Philippi.
- Verses 20-24: Paul expresses a freedom that in all things Christ will be magnified. Whether he lives or dies, Christ will be served. If he lives, he will continue to preach. If he dies, he will be with Christ. He would rather be with Christ, but he also knows he has a responsibility to serve the Philippians. He is willing to do whatever God wants of him. He is free to want to do what God wants and not what he wants. The most important thing is to conduct oneself in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.