

## The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

**Matthew 20:1–16** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first and the first last.”

In the Name of Jesus.

Revel in the words of the angel of the Lord to Joseph, ‘She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins!’

One key that unlocks the saying at which our Old Man inside can only rebel: ‘Unfair!’ ‘The first will be last and the last first!’ Yes! Or, as the angel said, “His whole NAME means ‘He will save His people from their sins!’”

So, my dear Christians, if—despite your Baptism into Christ which you can rely on every moment; despite His Holy Supper, Body and Blood with forgiveness, life and salvation; despite the Good News from which our New Man springs: ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, NOT counting their sins against them!’—

If despite all of that, our Old Man gets the upper hand now and then, the Lord Jesus saves us from our sins, from ourselves with these words: ‘The first will be last and the last first.’

So when you and I conclude that WE are putting out WAY MORE giving toward the next man—even the next Christian!—than the next man is giving to us; and so, surely, God in heaven MUST see how WE stand OUT!—the Lord Jesus saves us from where all that leads, demanding that God judge us according to what we deserve.

And when we must admit that WE have not ‘thrown in’ as much as we could, been present when needed, the glorious accounting of the NEW heaven and NEW earth rescues us from us again!

There are ONLY two reactions our Old Adam can have to the Living God and the True Heaven. He is either HONEST with himself and his desires and thoughts and plans, and thus despairs of ever drawing near to the Living God. Or he fools himself and preens about as if people do not see him for what he really is.

But then....

My thoughts are NOT your thoughts! My intentions are NOT your intentions! My ways are NOT your ways!

Hold on! What if we can count on THAT! That God is not at ALL like us! Instead, by the conception by the Holy Spirit in

Joseph's wife, God makes for Himself a people who have ONLY one thing going for them: 'He will save His people from their sins!'

Reading Faulkner for my dissertation I ran across a term that might be obsolete in banking: the 'demand balance.' Today I believe they call that your 'available balance.' It seems that you used to be able to know a balance of funds you had at a bank that you could 'demand' the bank hand over. I'm sure our dear banks have insulated themselves against such inconveniences in our day.

But in one of Faulkner's novels, this fine fellow wants a child of his married; and he wants it done in the church he attends on a calculating basis, like the workers in the vineyard in today's simile of Jesus. In fact, he has his 'worthiness' so well calculated with the church and God and heaven and all that, he knows what he DESERVES and what NOT! This pastor, but not both; a nighttime wedding, not during the day; but TORCHES, of course; and so on. And Faulkner has this wonderful phrase he wrote to describe this mindset; a phrase I run back to all the time.

The man was calculating based on what Faulkner called his 'demand balance of spiritual solvency.' Is that not delicious?

As if God's thoughts ARE our thoughts and His ways ARE our ways!

He went to church—but not every week. So, he deserved SOMETHING back, but not the royal treatment!

He gave offerings—but nothing that would hurt his lifestyle. So, he figured he had banked something with the whole system, and was due SOMETHING.

I am going to say something to you today that I want you to hear very carefully. Perhaps we may need to discuss this in Bible class, or personally, if you really have a problem with it. But here goes. I intend this for the intentions of Jesus, to save us all from our sins.

I need to break the sad news to my therapist that I have no use for the word ‘relationship.’

My dear ones, it’s not a biblical word. And I am NOT just picking nits here!

You can use the phrase and still count yourself and Christian; so don’t get too worked up about it.

But the biblical picture is this: here is God, over here; and here is man, over here; and NOTHING must get in the way—says the Law of Moses—in the way of utter devotion to God!  
NOT...EVEN...YOUR...RELATIONSHIP...WITH...GOD!

‘Surely, we who have borne the heat of the day will get special treatment! Surely, WE have put in more to this THING between us, our RE-LA-TION-SHIP—and GOD must be aware

what is—‘

What is WHAT? DUE us? How do we face this calculation?

And the next man is there for you and me to love—NOT for us to put in deposits, carefully accounting—and then, WHAM-O!—the day comes when we DEMAND a WITHDRAWAL on our BALANCE!

I am forced to say that the closest synonym to the word ‘relationship’ is ‘tyranny!’ At LEAST, according to the thoughts and ways of men, and our dealings with God and each other.

Please admit this with me! You are better and holier than your pastor; but not all that much!

You calculate—like ME—that YOU have ‘put in’ more work, effort, love, thought, discipline, planning and sincerity—toward the person next you at work, in your bed at home, at the Thanksgiving Day table, etc. And you calculate—like ME!—that if the next one had ANY appreciation for YOUR deposits, then HE would throw in: MORE; SOMETHING; something SIGNIFICANT!

Dear disciples of Jesus: He truly intends to save us from THAT! And from ALL of THAT! In fact, He has done it!

And He keeps calling, baptizing, teaching, raising up new

Men all the time: men and women and children, little ones, who live from the free promise that God is NOT going to treat us according to what we deserve, or do not deserve. In fact, He is not going to check in with our balance at all with Him now—not since Christ died and rose and ascended! He will not make a single demand withdrawal from us....

AND—here’s the Goodest part of the Good News today! The Lord Jesus saves us in a way so unlike the way we are, He does this:

He calls us to follow Him! Meaning, HE don’ think that HE is ANY higher, better, more deserving, more sincere, more loving, more godly....THAN...ANYONE!

That is the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Since HIS sacrifice, ALL such calculations are wiped clean off the books! And what SOUNDS like His demand to us today—to wipe all such thoughts and plans and ways off our books—is His Happiest of all Salvations!

He is calling on you and me to bank ONLY on the promise made to us the day we were baptized! That God is now our Father and we are His dear children—NOT because of ANY reference to what WE put in with God! Not today, not tomorrow, not ever!

So when the NEXT MAN says that you owe HIM, or GOD, ANYTHING, before you can rise in peace and live in peace and

sleep in peace, die and rise again in peace—the Gospel today tells you that those are NOT the thoughts of your Savior.

And when YOU give off the vibe to the next man, that YOU at least—and now probably GOD TOO!—are about done with him, because of his bankruptcy of love, devotion, appreciation—

The Lord's Word, His Body and Blood, His Church, His Baptism, and His prayer are all intended for one thing: to save you, and even ME, from what we are and what we figure...

‘Our Father Who art in heaven....look at the way WE have overlooked the sins and debts of those around us....and NOW you know the way YOU need to settle accounts with US too!’

Who can pray that, other than the baptized; those whose only claim on God is that Jesus will save His people from their sins? In the Name of Jesus. Amen.