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## Sermon for Sunday, September 18, 2011

Sermon Texts: Exodus 32: 1-14  
Psalm 145  
Matthew 20: 1-16  
Philippians 1: 21-27

Sermon Title: "Working in the Vineyard"  
Sermon Topic: Christian service: burden or privilege?  
Sermon Purpose: To teach that serving Christ is not for the self-seeking who are striving to have their own egos stroked, or to be noticed for their efforts.

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*Sermon Prayer: Creator God, You have given us Your written and living Word to help us understand Your Will for our lives. As we search these Scriptures and ponder Your teachings, help us to know Your presence, to experience Your power, and to grow in our faith.*

*Now, may the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.*

Since the 1980's, our nation's inhabitants seem to all be listening to the same radio station, WIIFM (What's In It For Me?). It would appear that everyone's thinking "If I'm going to help, I should be paid. And, if I'm going to be paid, let's make a contract."

There is a **growing** attitude in our country that if we **give** extra, we expect to be **paid** extra.

In the verses just preceding today's parable, the disciples were beginning to question our Lord as to **their** rewards for serving **Him**. Peter says, in verse 27, "We have given up **everything** to follow you, Jesus. What are we going to **get** for it?" Jesus then gave him a wonderful promise of rewards in **this** life **and** in the **next**. They would have **everything** they had given up **returned** to them a hundred-fold **and more**, plus sit on thrones in heaven. But, somehow, this wasn't good enough for Peter because he wasn't sure all this sacrifice was **worth** it.

In 1989, a man in Texas **sued** the pastor **and** the congregation of the church he had joined because he was promised that if he would believe in Christ Jesus and tithe 10% of his income, he would be blessed with happiness and a return on his investment. He claimed that neither happened, and so he was suing the church for fraud. It shows to what ridiculous ends some people will go for selfish gains.

Our loving Father promises us **peace** and **love** and an abundant **life** when we put Him first. But, as Jesus pointed out to Peter, this is not **supposed** to be our **motivation** for serving Him - our service is not supposed to be a **bargaining tool** for receiving God's love and blessings. Some who are **first** in their **own** eyes will be **last** in God's **judgment**, and some who are **last** will end up **first**.

### **1. THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD REVEALS TWO KINDS OF WORKERS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

In this morning's Gospel Lesson, we see a story within a story. We see that a workday consisted of **twelve** hours of labor - not **eight**, as most have, today. We also see that - like today - work was **scarce**, if people were **still** waiting to be hired after standing around the labor pool for eleven hours.



The first kind of worker was **willing** to work hard, but **only** with a contract. He wanted to be **sure** that he knew **exactly** what he would receive. So, he agreed to work all day for a penny. Translated into our service to God, it is similar to our willingness to give up an hour every Sunday to attend worship - but we had better **get** something **out** of it, have someone **praise** us for being there, and we had better **feel good** by the time we leave.

Well, the workers hired **first** were paid "**according to their contract.**" If they could have just been satisfied! But, their pride and selfishness came out in anger when they saw that those who had worked **less** were receiving the **same** pay as they received. In their eyes, these latecomers were receiving **more** because they **worked less**.

The second kind of worker was happy to serve and trust the generosity of the owner. He served out of gratefulness. He worked, not for a reward, but for the chance to prove himself to the owner. He was glad to **get** work - any kind and any amount - and he believed the owner would be fair and worthy of his trust. Whatever this man chose to give him would be a **blessing**; since he had been at the labor pool all day and no one had given him the chance to prove himself. Quite possibly, he had a family to care for. Going home without **any** money would show him to be a poor provider, make him **appear** to be a sluggard, and surely cause hardship all the way around. And, it wouldn't do his **self-image** any good, either!

Because of the pure heart and motivation for serving, this group was given **more** than they would have ever **hoped** for. You see, Jesus is lifting up the heart of the **true** servant; one who serves from devotion to his master, not for a reward.

In a book entitled, "Try Giving Yourself Away," the author, David Dunn, tells about a woman in the lobby of Union Station in Cincinnati, Ohio, waiting for the train. She saw a young female, about twenty years of age, sitting alone in the corner of the station. Then she saw a mother with two crying children and an armload of packages enter the train station and sit down across from the young woman. Before the woman could get settled into her seat, the young lady hopped up and ran over to her. "Can I take care of your two children while you go out and get something to eat?" she asked. "You look a little tired and the next train isn't due for a while, so why don't you let me help you? I'm very good with children." Startled, the mother said, "Oh, thank you! That would be wonderful." And she left the two little girls in the care of this anonymous and generous baby sitter. A little later, the mother returned with some refreshments, looking relaxed and refreshed. "Thank you so much," she said. And the young adult enthused, "Are you catching the next train?" "Yes," she replied, "as soon as I can get everything together." "Let me help you," the young helper offered. And then she gathered all of the lady's packages and headed toward the train. After they boarded, she waved and said "good-bye." Then, she turned and went back into the train lobby and sat down. She wasn't seated more than ten minutes when she spotted **another** mother with children. So, she walked over and volunteered to baby-sit, once again. And, after a while, that mother boarded the train, and then this drifting helper found **another** mother and did the same thing. By this time, the observer was puzzled, so she approached this young woman in her twenties, and said, "I'm curious. I've been watching you for an hour or so, and you've spent the entire time helping these young mothers and their children. Why are you doing this?"

"Oh," she said, "I was one of five children. My Dad was in the Army and we were always moving from one place to another. My Mom got so tired carrying the packages and the suitcases, and caring for all of us. I remember her saying to me, 'You are so good with children.' My Dad went to war in Europe and he never came back, so that left my Mom alone. And, she just recently died. So, I thought that maybe I could do something for others because she said I was so good with the kids. I thought there would be a lot of mothers who would be tired, here, so that's why I came to the station! It makes me feel good. It really helps!"

That's understanding Christianity the self-sacrificial way - and it's wonderful!

## **2. OUR LORD IS CHALLENGING US TO LOOK AT OUR MOTIVATION FOR SERVING**

Can we, for one day, go to work in His vineyard and serve just because we love Him? Can we love someone - parent, spouse, child, neighbor, friend - just because they're a gift from our heavenly



Father in our vineyard? Can we find one act of love to do that **no one else will know about**? Can we simply and utterly trust God to see **this** reason behind our actions and **trust** that God will treat us fairly: not as we **deserve** - because of a contract, but out of **generosity** - like the land owner granting a gift from His great wealth and His generous heart?

Let us pray:

Father, cause us to show by outward acts of service the fruits of an inner grace. May our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. May our love and unselfishness, liberality and sacrifice put to shame the sordid greed of the world. As a tree is known by its fruits, so we pray that **our** lives may be known by the good works they bring forth out of service to our Christ. Help us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. All this we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

