

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
September 21, 2008

Readings: Isaiah 55:6-9; Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a; Matthew 20:1-16a

Seek the Lord While He May Be Found

Yesterday I went down to the California Wine Grape Store with my son and some friends and picked up about 1800 pounds of grapes that, over the next week, we will begin turning into wine. So it is appropriate that we should hear in our gospel about men being hired to work in the vineyard.

Now the men, and probably women and children, who worked to grow and pick my grapes surely didn't work for a landowner as generous as the one in our bible story. Hopefully, their landowner was at least fair and honest and just, but he could not compare with the landowner in our gospel. And that's because the landowner represents God and His infinite mercy; His compassion and kindness.

It's a hard story for us to comprehend. Every day we see all the greed of the corporate leaders on Wall Street; men that ran financial institutions into the ground and ruined lives of many, but walk away with hundreds of millions of dollars for themselves. We see politicians lining their own pockets. We see corporations laying off employees and cutting wages and benefits, while executives are collecting outrageous salaries, bonuses, and perks.

So it's hard for us to imagine that an employer would give an employee a full day's wage for only an hour's work. Did they deserve a full day's wage? Probably not. But the landowner didn't look at what they deserved, he looked at what they needed. They needed to provide for their families just as much as the men who had worked all day. They had been out looking for work all day, but no one had hired them. The landowner went beyond obligation and acted out of generosity. We need to try to do likewise; to be not only just but also merciful and generous. So it is with God. God's ways are not man's ways.

None of us deserve the gifts we receive from God, but God is willing to offer them to us anyways because of His compassion and generosity. He will give us what we need, and not necessarily what we deserve. We can look at the good thief who died on the cross with Jesus. After a life of crime that deserved crucifixion, his faith in Christ came in the last hour of his life and he was rewarded with paradise that very day.

We do not want to wait until the last hour of our life to turn away from our sinful ways because we do not know the hour when God will call us and we might miss our opportunity to turn back toward God. But it is important to remember that no matter how old we are, how serious the sins of our past, that God will give us a full share in the Kingdom if we turn to him, confess our sins, and make a commitment to try not to sin again.

We are called to conversion according to God's plan, and not all of us are called at the same point in life. Some live virtuously from childhood; and some live lives that require a bigger dose of God's mercy and find a relationship with Jesus only later in life. And it can be frustrating when a loved one doesn't follow our same schedule of conversion. We go through a conversion experience and wonder why everyone hasn't followed us. We forget about how we rejected Christ's message for so long before the Holy Spirit softened our hearts. We need to pray for those who have not yet found the love of Christ and we need to lead lives of good example. But in the end, we need to realize that God's ways are not our ways. We need to trust that God's

Spirit will work in our friends and loved ones and lead them to conversion according to His plan. We need to trust that God loves us and is calling us to be close to Him despite the sins of our past. He wants what ever time we have left, and will reward us with a wage that surpasses anything we deserve.

Let me end with the words of God spoken through the prophet Isaiah in our first reading this morning; words that are meant for us today: ***“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving.”***

Deacon Joe Hulway