

THE LIVING
WORD
OF
THE SEASON AFTER
PENTECOST

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

September 17 - September 23

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 20

The Gospel of Matthew records the only account of the Parable of the Vineyards. The imagery is captivating. Matthew 20:1: “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”

In ancient Israel, grapes were among the most important crops, and with harvest season upon them, the work must be done properly and in a timely fashion. Jesus tells the story of workers being sent out into the fields at various times throughout the day: very early, then at 9:00 am, noon, and 3:00 pm, with the last group heading out close to 5:00 pm. Everyone is promised a day’s wages (a denarius).

When evening comes, and the owner of the vineyard and the foreman begin paying, those who arrived closest to the end are paid first. They receive a denarius. Naturally, those who have been there longer expect more pay. That seems fair, right? But to their surprise (and ours), they receive the same amount and begin complaining. And just like that, the pendulum shifts from gratitude to grumbling.

Have you ever been on a path toward gratitude for your day, only to find yourself sliding into grumbling by the end? Ever faced an internal battle between what seems right to you and what feels unfair? That is exactly what happens in the parable.

Verse 15 pushes back on this attitude: “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds notes that, “The expression ‘are you envious’ (20:14) can be rendered literally, ‘Is your eye evil?’ (cf. 6:23), indicating that the laborer cannot be thankful because he is so blinded with self-centered envy.”

The parable ends with the often-quoted declaration, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Who do you relate to most in this story? The hardworking laborer who arrived early, worked all day, and expected a fair day’s wage, only to be crushed by unfair treatment? Or the one who showed up late, did less work, and rejoiced in their good fortune? Or somewhere in between?



What is the parable trying to teach us? Well, it is not about salvation or earning eternal life through our good works. Titus 3:5 says, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” And it is not about the rewards for our service. God will reward us according to what he knows is best. It is an awakening to the kingdom of Heaven, a lesson on gratitude, and a call to service.

No matter what time of day we show up to do God’s work, there are rewards. And we should always give thanks for those who show up to join us in his kingdom work, no matter what time of day they arrive.

FOR reflection

As we reflect on kingdom work, pause to read 1 Corinthians 3:5-9:

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed; Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

How will you serve the Lord this week and give thanks for those who serve with you? What is your assigned task? What is our one purpose?



SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Thursday	Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Exodus 15:22-27; 2 Corinthians 13:1-4
Friday	Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Exodus 16:1-21; 2 Corinthians 13:5-10
Saturday	Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Exodus 16:22-30; Matthew 19:23-30
Sunday	Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Exodus 16:2-15; Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16
Monday	Psalm 119:97-104; Exodus 16:31-35; Romans 16:1-16
Tuesday	Psalm 119:97-104; Numbers 11:1-9; Romans 16:17-20
Wednesday	Psalm 119:97-104; Numbers 11:18-23, 31-32; Matthew 18:1-5

Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

The Morning Liturgy

Opening Scripture

O send out your light and your truth, that they may lead me,
and bring me unto your holy hill, and to your dwelling.

Psalm 43:3

Opening Prayer *(based on Psalm 51)*

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit
within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not
your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help
again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the
Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the
beginning, is now, and will be forever. *Amen.*

Scripture Reading *(read Psalm and Gospel text here)*

Period of Silence

Confessing Our Faith *(Apostles' Creed)*

The Lord's Prayer

The Collect *(Proper 20)*

*Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things,
but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are
placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast
to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one
God, forever and ever. Amen.*

A Midday Prayer

Blessed Savior, at this hour you hung upon the cross, stretching out your loving arms. Grant that all the peoples of the earth may look to you and be saved; for your mercies' sake. *Amen.*

An Early Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. *Amen.*

A Bedtime Confession and Prayer

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. *Amen.*

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let Your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let Your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.



