

“By Comparison” – Pr Jim Sprengle, September 20, 2020 Ascension Lutheran – Portland

- I. **Matthew 20:1** - ¹ “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.”
- II. **Comparing things can be good or bad**
 - a. Technology allows us to comparison shop in ways like never before.
 - i. If I go to an electronics store, I can scan an item and find the best price – of which that store will match
 - ii. I can look online to get the price of a vehicle compare the sticker price to get a better deal
 - iii. I can pull up 20 different retailers in a long line to compare their price on any product and compare the details and the reviews
 - b. But comparing my life and situation to others is almost always bad
 - i. First of all, it usually includes some amount of pride
 1. We either look down on the other person because they are doing something we don’t approve of – maybe they are constantly out of work... maybe they have differing political views... maybe they are unkind.
 2. Or, we look up at the other person because they have what we want – things like a better job, car, home, or spouse...
 - c. A therapist by the name of Windy Dryden coined the word, “comparisonitis” to explain this constant looking at others and coveting what they have...
 - i. Just as easily as we can comparison shop for 50 different prices on one single item – we can pull up 100’s of 1000’s of pictures and stories about others who look better, make more money, and have a much “better life” than we do.
 - ii. Social media is a killer when it comes to comparisonitis – although not all of you are using it, the majority of people are scrolling through Facebook, Instagram, and other platforms to see what others are doing.
 - iii. Not only do we look at what others are doing, we try to make ourselves look better by the things we post and share.
 1. You know the person... the one who is always sharing pictures of how cute they are, how many bike rides they take each week, or maybe pictures of beaches they travel to all over the world.
 2. Sometimes we look at the things others are doing, and we can’t help but feel like we don’t measure up.... Like we aren’t thin enough, don’t have enough friends, or our life is sort of boring.
 - d. Comparing ourselves to others is a trap that comes from the devil.

- i. Even pastors struggle with this issue as we see other churches and pastors who seem to have thriving ministries and churches
 - 1. One of the favorite questions you hear (and that I'm guilty of asking for the wrong reason) is "how many worship each week?"
 - ii. Church members do the same thing as they talk to friends or family about their home congregations –
 - 1. Then we return to our own church and wonder why we don't do so well in youth, or music, or visitation, or whatever...
 - 2. We see good things happening elsewhere, and we often overlook the good things happening right where we are...
 - e. Comparisonitis often overlooks the good things we already have.
- III. **Jesus tells a parable to His disciples in today's Gospel**
 - a. In chapter 19, leading up to this parable, Jesus deals with the rich young ruler who instead of following Jesus, walked away.
 - i. Jesus says how hard it is for a rich person to enter heaven, and the disciples were shocked because they thought the rich were blessed by God and would therefore definitely go to heaven.
 - b. Then Peter says that he and his fellow disciples left everything, so by comparison to that rich young ruler... what do we get?
 - i. Jesus says a "hundredfold and eternal life" (Matthew 19:29) but immediately follows it up with "But many first ones will be last and many last ones will be first." (Matthew 19:30)
 - c. He then goes on to tell what He means through the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.
 - d. Consider His first words, "The kingdom of heaven..." or the reign of heaven that has come to you in this place is like...
 - i. Jesus helps us to understand that His presence in the world brings the kingdom, the reign of heaven right into our midst... it is not some far off, distant place
 - e. So, the kingdom of heaven is like a man who owns a vineyard and has no time to waste!
 - i. He cannot wait for His grapes to rot and die on the vine, he must immediately go find help to harvest
 - ii. Notice the workers don't come to him, he finds them and brings them
 - 1. He offers them a day's wage for a day's work – which happens to be 6am to 6pm – that's a long day of work!
 - 2. Then he goes out at 9am, noon, 3pm and even 5pm to go get more helpers
 - iii. After 6pm, the owner has his foreman gather up all the people he found to labor harvesting grapes, and he starts with the last guys first...the 5pm people... giving them a full day's wage in a denarius

1. Then the 3pm guys... the noon guys... the 9am guys... even the 6am guys... got the same – one day’s wage, a denarius
- f. Have you ever been in that position before?
 - i. Maybe you worked for a company that handed out bonuses at the end of the year... and you find out the slacker who rode on your coattails the whole time got the same amount as you. That’s not fair!
 - ii. Perhaps you and your siblings worked on something and the littlest ones who did nothing but run around and cause trouble got the same treat at the end as you... that’s not fair!
 - iii. We deal with this at the soccer clinic every year... some of our leaders and youth work incredibly hard from day one, while others might show up at the end of the week on Thursday or Friday. But on Friday night, all of the youth and leaders go on the beach trip and have fun... it doesn’t seem fair.
 - g. The trouble we have is, “comparisonitis” – or looking at others and not feeling good about what we have – or somehow what they have LESSENS what I have.
 - h. Jesus has an answer for this – and we may not like it – “I do what I want.”
 - i. As in Isaiah 55:8-9, God says to us today that there is NO COMPARISON to our thoughts and ways and His thoughts and His ways.

IV. **The God of our salvation** wants us to see our equality at the foot of the cross.

- a. Our mixed up view of what’s good or fair has nothing to do with what God wants – His goal is to save all people – no matter when
- b. Sure, some of us might labor our whole lives (from 6am to 6pm) – and then watch as some guy on his death bed comes to faith at 5:55pm and still goes to heaven... that’s not bad... that’s amazing grace!!
 - i. We should be incredibly grateful... filled with gratitude that God is not like us – by comparison, we would condemn, but God is merciful
 - ii. By comparison, we would ask for a person to “pay” for their lack of work or get less than us... but salvation is equal treasure for all.
 - iii. By comparison the grace and mercy we might offer would be with “strings attached” – but God’s grace and mercy are a free gift out of pure, selfless, and unconditional love
- c. Think about it – If Jesus decided it wasn’t “fair” to die for everyone else’s sins... where would we be?
 - i. If Jesus had thought one moment about His personal well-being and what He was getting out of the deal... where would we be?
- d. As our Savior, the free gift of grace means this – no qualifications needed.
 - i. We want to make salvation transactional – but God’s ways and thoughts are much bigger than that – He freely gives to anyone.

- ii. Grace beyond measure is a good thing, and each of us with grateful hearts can thank Him for pouring it out equally on all people.
- e. By God's grace we are the harvesters given the work of sharing Jesus with others so they too may receive the same wage as we do...
- f. And by comparison... always remember, there is no comparison.... to the free gift of forgiveness, life and salvation found in the Lord!