

☩ In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ☩

On the front of your bulletin is the word Septuagesima, a fancy Latin term meaning 70, signaling to us that we are only 70 days away from Holy Week. In the vernacular, it is often called pre-Lent, or more fitting, Gesamatide. For each of the next Sundays, we'll have a different name ending with Gesima. And this indeed is the time of preparation for the fast of Lent, the great fast of 40 days mirroring our Lord's own fast in the wilderness. And like anything strenuous, whether emotionally, mentally, or physically, It is foolish to go in without preparation. It is beneficial to you to prepare beforehand, to stretch, to prepare yourself for the intense period ahead. Gesamatide pre-Lent is precisely this. It is a time to take a step back from the excitement of Christmas, to step back from the revelations of Epiphany, and to begin to focus in on the passion and death of Christ. To bring before your mind and your eyes his suffering and his agony, and to be reminded that it is for you and your sin that he suffers, and that by his suffering he has set you free from sin, so that you might live in righteousness. As this season begins and as we come to Lent proper in a few weeks, we are hyper-focused upon the atoning sacrifice of Christ and precisely what that means. We are focused on what it means to be bought by the very blood of God, to be washed in it and made new by it, we focus on the life of the Christian as one separate, set apart from the world, set apart and transfigured by the events of the cross. And a part of this is the removal of the word Alleluia from our worship service. This change serves as a weekly reminder to us of the somber nature of this season, of the price of our salvation, the cost of our Lord's very body and blood. We're reminded that alleluia cannot always be our song while here below.

And so the fathers and mothers in the faith has handed down to you this period now to prepare for your journey, that you might do what Christ commands you to do, to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow him. That is, to live a life of service not for yourself, but for your neighbor. To care for the needs of those hurting and those sick. To bless others as you have been blessed. To do what the Church has done since ancient times, of placing extra emphasis upon fasting and prayer and

almsgiving. They have increased their giving to the Church and to charities as a reminder that their own wealth is not their own, but it is a trust and gift from God. And this is indeed a practice that is commendable and profitable for us as well. Increase your prayer, your almsgiving, and begin the fast.

What then does this parable have to do with the season? Why are we placing this parable of the workers here at the front of Lent? It is here because in this parable we are reminded against the tendency of complacency. The tendency that you and I have of becoming lazy in our duties as Christians and thinking far more highly of ourselves than we should.

We know that standing idle in the marketplace is bad. Standing idle in the vineyard is worse. For Christ calls us to a life of toil and work in his kingdom. All those who labor, yes, receive the same wages. Out of the generosity of the master, yes, we all receive eternal life, but the work is not insignificant. First, let me show you that indeed standing idle in the marketplace is bad. As Christians, you are called to labor. You are called into the kingdom of God, into his vineyard, to work. The master of the house comes to hire workers, not to hire men to simply stand around. The master comes to those who are idle and provides meaningful, fruitful work, work that will produce something. And so we see in this call how God calls us out of the idleness of the world into the meaningful and godly work of his kingdom. but all too often we are complacent and selfish. We see our vocations and our jobs, the places in which the Lord has called us to work, not as something given to us by God for his glory, to care for his people and his things, but as a tool to serve ourselves, to bring to ourselves glory And to bring us pleasure. Something that we can pick up and set aside as much as we please. If we desire to stand idle, who is God to tell us otherwise? I deserve rest. But God has not called you out of the marketplace to be idle. He's called you to work. Apart from God's kingdom, there is no salvation, and you do not stand idle in God's vineyard. You are not actually free to set aside the places in life God has given you. You are not free to ignore your task, your position as mother and father, as child, worker, citizen, and Christian. To set these things aside is to deny God's authority over you and it is to exclude yourself from the congregation of God. It is to separate yourself from the gifts of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

You are not called to be idle. You are called to work, to enter the vineyard and to labor there alongside others in your various places in life. You did not choose it, but God chose you to be a mother, a father, a child, a worker. Your vocation is not something you have chosen, but a gift God has bestowed upon you so that you might serve one another, not to serve and please yourself. But time and time again, we look at our vocations and we ask ourselves, how does this serve me? How does my relationship benefit me? If I have another child, won't that mean I have to sacrifice more things? We see being a mother, a father, a husband, wife, parent, child, take your pick of any of the places God has placed you in your life as a burden. We even do it to being Christian. We shrink from the responsibilities the Lord has given to us simply because we don't want to do it, because we claim it is too hard, the sun is too hot, and the reward is not worth it.

We don't want to do it because it is work. Living as a Christian, Serving your neighbor is work. Those who complained, who grumbled, were right. They bore the heat of the sun. But this is not a bad thing. The heat of the sun is nothing compared to the heat of the Lord's wrath. which Christ bears for you. The heat of the sun should, instead of driving us to complacency, drive us into a likeness to Christ. For he suffers all things and willingly conforms himself over and over and over again to the Father. He bears the wrath of God, the scorn of the world, the hatred of mankind, your sin, And does it without grumbling. He does it without opening his mouth as he is led like a sheep to the slaughter. He does it willingly because he knows it is the will of his Father and he will not begrudge the Father's generosity to call poor, miserable sinners like you into his vineyard. To give to poor, miserable, despicable sinners like you. eternal life the riches of the kingdom, the inheritance of Christ. So what if we bear the burden of the hot sun christ has born far more. So what if God chooses to give to someone else the same thing that he chooses to give to you; even though you have to work for longer? So be it.

The labor is good in and of itself. The point of the labor is not to earn yourself salvation, for your work will never be enough. The point of the labor the Lord has given you is that you might be made like Christ, that you might be formed in the crucible of trial and suffering to submit yourself to

the will of the Father. And this is the great irony of this parable, that those who bear the heat of the day don't get it. They should have been made like the master who is generous. And yet they scoff, and they mock and they grumble at his generosity. They think they deserve more.

They who were standing idle in the marketplace, who had no desire to go out seeking labor, but were content in their laziness. Who were content with nothing. The Lord came and promised them everything. Yet they have the audacity to complain when he does the same for others. This, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is why we have Lent, lest we who bear the burden of the sun in this life might become complacent and lazy and boastful, thinking that we have somehow earned our salvation.

We struggle and we fight and we bear the heat of the sun, not that we might pat ourselves on the back that we might be molded and formed to be like Christ, that we might not begrudge the generosity of our Lord. For the temptation is there. Do not let it overcome you. Sin is crouching at your doorstep, desiring to rule over you. You must rise up and rule over it. You must fight. You must labor. And you must work, lest you become like those who grumble, who miss the point of what the Lord has called them to do. Rejoice in your vocations. Rejoice in your sufferings, in your difficulties, for in these things you are made and shaped to be like Christ. Rejoice and give thanks to God: that we all receive the same thing at the end of the day; that in spite of our sin, in spite of our failures, we receive a denarius. We receive eternal life. Whether you've been Lutheran or Christian your whole life or not, God is merciful, and he is generous. He gives to you Christ's inheritance. Let this be enough.

☩ In Jesus name. Amen. ☩