



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup Study

June 16, 2024
Matthew 20:1-16

Community

THEME FOR TODAY

This family should not be concerned with birth order. This is a family established by God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. No greater favors are offered some in the family, but each family member receives an equal share of God's gifts.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

We want to learn how envy can be a destructive power and how it can twist us into something much less than what we were created to be. Instead of comparing our talents and success to someone else's, we need to focus on the best use of everything that God has given to us.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to focus our daily lives on accomplishing the work that God wants us to do in the world.

INTRODUCTION

A movie called *Envy* was released in 2004, illustrating how envy can consume someone.

Envy is just one of the seven deadly sins. Sevendeadlysins.com describes them this way:

Pride is excessive belief in one's own abilities that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. It has been called the sin from which all others arise. Pride is also known as vanity.

Envy is the desire for others' traits, status, abilities, or situation.

Gluttony is an inordinate desire to consume more than that which one requires.

Lust is an inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body.

Anger is manifested in the individual who spurns love and opts instead for fury. It is also known as wrath.

Greed is the desire for material wealth or gain, ignoring the realm of the spiritual. It is also called avarice or covetousness.

Sloth is the avoidance of physical or spiritual work.

Please see last page picture of Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516): The Seven Deadly Sins. At the center of the painting is Christ watching the world through the eye of God. Depictions of the seven deadly sins are arranged around Christ. This circular layout, with God in the center, represents God's all-seeing eye. No sin goes unnoticed. The “four last things” mentioned in late medieval spiritual handbooks – deathbed,

the last judgment, heaven, and hell – appear in the four corners. These are common themes in separate Bosch panels.

Today we will consider how we often compare our blessings with the blessings of others, which can lead to envy. Envy can become a downward spiral and twist us into something we were not created to become.

ICEBREAKER

What's your most recent experience with envy? Why do you think it's so easy to fall into the trap of envy?

PRAY TOGETHER

God, you provide for our daily needs and bless us differently and uniquely. Help us to understand our giftedness, and use those skills and talents to do the work that you want us to do. Focus us on everything that matters to you and makes a difference in your kingdom. At the end of our life, we want to hear you speak these words: “well done, good and faithful servant.” Amen.

Content

(Read Matthew 20:1-16). At first blush, it is easy to identify with the servants who have worked all day long, and their hard feelings toward the owner of the vineyard. It does not seem fair that they are paid the same wage as those who only worked part of the day.

The owner, out of generosity, wants to help others earn the daily wage necessary to meet their needs. God wants all people to be able to earn what they need, and seeks throughout the day to help that happen.

The landowner's second motivation is revealed in his comments to people he finds in the marketplace. His question is telling: “Why are you standing here idle all day?” The landowner wants everyone to be productive at work, not standing idle. God wants us to invest ourselves in work, not remain dormant. Dormancy creates many problems: low self-esteem, destructive behaviors, hopelessness, etc. God wants us to thrive and live, so putting us to work is an important agenda for God. God meets our daily needs. God wants us to be productive in our work.

DISCUSSION

How does God provide for our daily needs? How important is work to you? How is your identity defined by what you do?

This perspective has not occurred to the people who were hired at the beginning of the day. They are only thinking about the amount of time and effort they have expended on behalf of the landowner. They are aware that people kept joining them in the field throughout the day, working shorter and shorter hours alongside them.

Envy is a social sin, always triggered in comparison to others. That is the second point this text teaches us. Our focus before God is to do the work that God has asked each of us to accomplish, not to compare ourselves to anyone else around us.

DISCUSSION

Talk about a time when you felt this kind of unfairness. What work do you think God has for you to accomplish?

Second, our callings in this world are different, and will have different earthly rewards attached to them. Here is where the eternal perspective is so critical. Our world values different talents in very different ways. Consequently, the inequality that is so prevalent in our society is based on completely different measuring sticks than the ones God uses. That is why Jesus says, “the first will be last, and the last first.” In other words, God’s way of measuring value will be completely at odds with the way the world chooses to value people and their contributions. The Kingdom of God rewards very different things than the world we live in today. The tension for us is to live in this world, and its crazy system of value, with eternity in our focus every day.

DISCUSSION

Name some people with whom you easily compare yourself. What are some gifts, talents, skills you have that make you unique?

GOING DEEPER: ANTIDOTES TO ENVY

A few practical steps have been identified to help us with this very real human emotion. First, if I focus on what I have accomplished, and the work I am to do, it helps mitigate the feelings that I have toward someone else who looks more successful, or seems to have gotten a better deal. Envy is often rooted in my poor feelings about myself. Successfully tackling envy begins with affirmation. The Holy Spirit wants to give Christians affirmation each day as we follow Jesus. The affirmation “well done, good and faithful servant” comes from God to each of us as we accomplish what God has asked us to do.

DISCUSSION

Talk about some things you have accomplished in your life. Why is it so hard to talk about ourselves? Where are you most affirmed? How does that make you feel? Are there affirmations that you can share with one another in the group?

Application

There is a direct connection between the gifts, talents, and skills we’ve been given and the work that God wants us to do in the world. Help each other identify how a gift or skill can be directly translated into the work God wants us to do. This week, put that gift or skill to new use. Come back to the group and report what happened.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you have created each of us to accomplish specific work in your world. You have given us skills and talents that can be used in your Kingdom’s plan for the redemption of all things. We are easily caught up in comparing our blessings to the blessings of others. We judge ourselves to be unworthy and incapable. In this coming week, help us to use the gifts you have given more wisely. Guide and direct us so that we are focused on doing the work you ask us to do. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Faith in Daily Life

Matthew 19:21

In the chapters between Matthew 18 and 23, Jesus gives many glimpses into the places where faith and real life intersect. Growing in humility, exercising forgiveness, deepening relationships with one another and with God are themes that rise to the top. As you read through these passages, ask what wider implications Jesus’ answer to the rich young ruler found in 19:21 have for our lives together. How will you grow faith in your daily life this week?



Matthew 20:1-16 NLT “For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. (2) He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work. (3) “At nine o’clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. (4) So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. (5) So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o’clock he did the same thing. (6) “At five o’clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, ‘Why haven’t you been working today?’ (7) “They replied, ‘Because no one hired us.’ “The landowner told them, ‘Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.’ (8) “That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. (9) When those hired at five o’clock were paid, each received a full day’s wage. (10) When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day’s wage. (11) When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, (12) ‘Those people worked only one hour, and yet you’ve paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.’ (13) “He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual wage? (14) Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. (15) Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?’ (16) “So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last.”