

## Sermon Transcript for Septuagesima, January 31, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right, first off, we have the Old Testament lesson with Moses wandering around in the wilderness with the people of Israel and they're complaining, as they are wont to do. This time that there is no water and so God sends Moses to go hit a rock with the staff that he touched the Nile with to part the Red Sea. Now, this is the time where God said, "Hit the rock." There comes a second time later on where Moses is so frustrated with the people and does not listen closely to the Word of God and begins to think that he is the one that is in charge of the people of Israel, and so he hits the rock when God only told him to speak to the rock. Now that's a whole 'nother story, a whole 'nother portion of the book of Exodus. So we're not going to get into much of it here. But in this one, he did what God commanded. He struck the rock and then when we get into First Corinthians, we learned that this rock was following Israel, spiritually, anyway. Then Paul equates the rock that the water comes out of physically in the Old Testament, as a spiritual rock from which the waters of baptism come to us in the New Testament. And so we see this story as a precursor and an explanation of why the rock was there and why water would come from that rock.

We connect that, then, with our own baptisms, into the confession of Jesus Christ, the rock upon which the church stands. It even talks about baptism, baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. And yet it says even though all of them were baptized, even though all of them were under Moses and they had the spiritual rock that followed them, God was displeased with many of them so that many of them died in the wilderness and were not saved. Now, what does that mean? There's a limited number of people that God actually loves? And if we're not one of them, tough luck? We're out of luck? No, but we are called to act as if we need to strive with all of our effort to fall in line with what God desires for our lives, not out of fear, and not out of hope that we gain some physical wellbeing, but because we trust God, that He will give us all good things for those who love Him and keep His commands, for those who believe in His Word.

Now, we can't keep His commands, so we have to rely upon the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Otherwise we would be like the people of Israel in the wilderness. We would be lost and forsaken. But because Christ was able to fulfill the commands of God, we are credited for that fulfillment through Him in the waters of our baptism. Well, still, we are called to run the race because as it describes in the Old Testament, there are ways that you can walk away from your faith. If you start grumbling and complaining, not trusting God for all things, beginning to think that there is nothing good that comes from God, that God is just out to punish you, or stopping, what we have talked about for several weeks now, stopping the going to church, the receiving of the Word of God and His blessings of the altar and the font, of denying your baptism, of stopping the reading of the Word of God, and just no longer hearing what God has to say. You can be so complacent, that the faith just dies out in your life. And so we are to hold firm to it, to discipline our bodies, to discipline our minds, so that we delve into the Word of God on a regular, daily basis, because that, and only that, is what strengthens us and preserves us in the one true faith. And so I encourage you once more, always and forever, to study the Word of God, to inwardly digest it, to be transformed by the renewing of your mind by the Word of God, so that you might be ready for whatever comes and you might receive the blessings of Christ with thanksgiving on that last day.

Now, all of that being said, let's get into the Gospel lesson. Again, we have a story with a ... well, let's not say an unwise, but rather, a generous man, someone who does not hold onto his money or his time or his efforts, who was not stingy with anything. We've heard about this same person in many other parables. As I like to say, the prodigal father and the wasteful farmer, the foolish farmer, who throws grain in places he ought not to do it. Same thing here. The same God. The same person. The kingdom of heaven is like this. God is so generous with His kingdom, that even those who come in and sneak in at the last hour, a deathbed confession, if you will, even those people will be rewarded with all the glories of heaven and eternal life with Christ. Why? Because God is generous. Now, there are people that.

Like I've said, this [parable] is mostly about God and understanding His nature, but it does tell us a little bit about ourselves. How often do we get jealous of others, where their lives seem to be going better than ours? And we might say, "Well, God, haven't I been your faithful servant since I was baptized? Don't I deserve a good life? Don't I deserve the blessings that my neighbor is getting?" And we might feel that God is being more generous to them than He is to us and there are times when we feel like, "But God, I've served you. Why do I have to go through this? Why do I get the cancer? Why, why am I the one that is suffering in these situations? Why does evil seem to prosper? And it's not fair. Those people do evil all those days and then they make a confession for God and you just forgive them?" You know, the thief on the cross, he actually deserved to die and yet he turned to Christ and asked Christ to remember him in His kingdom. And Christ said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." He did absolutely nothing to receive those blessings, but he has them all the same, just like you and me.

And so while this does tell us to be careful, not to be jealous or judgmental of what others have or what God is doing, the more important part of this is that God is generous beyond compare, that we deserve absolutely nothing from Him. He can be generous with whom He chooses to be generous and He is. He's generous to you and He's generous to me, and He has already told us what we will receive, the peace and the joy and the contentment. Now, those might not be gifts that you are looking for, you know, especially if you're having a hard time financially or you're having a physical illnesses or other problems in your life, or there's been an unexpected death in the family, or, you know, you're in a nation that we have to deal with this pandemic and there's fear of what may come because of it. But that's what we look for. That's what God promises: peace and joy and contentment. It doesn't mean that everything's going to go well. It doesn't mean that everything is going to be easy, but it does mean that we can trust that God will give generously to those with whom He loves, and He loves everyone. All He wants us to do is to recognize that, to praise Him and to thank Him and to give Him glory for His generosity each new day. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. If nothing else happens, the day is a gift of God and we are called to rejoice.

So, God is a prodigal father. He is a foolish farmer and He is a generous vineyard owner. He is more abundant in His blessings than we could possibly even soak up. We must turn to Him in all circumstances and keep our eyes like the competitor, like the runner. If you look backwards, or you look at your competitors and see what they're doing or see where they are, you're going to lose every time. But if you keep your eye on the goal, you have the opportunity to achieve that goal, which is to run the race with perseverance. This is a race. It's a marathon and the only way we get through it is keeping our eyes on the goal, keeping our eyes upon Christ, keeping our eyes in the Word of God, because that is what will keep our feet strong and our steps steady so that we might cross that finish line of life and rehear the blessed words of our Lord and Savior. "Well done, good and faithful servant. Receive your reward and the gift of God, of everlasting life." That is what we were looking forward to. Hold fast to and firm to the promises of God, and He will not forsake you.

May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, until life everlasting. Amen.