

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 5C
April 3, 2022
Luke 20:9-20

What Will the Vineyard Owner Do?

And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. . . . 13 Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'" (Luke 20:9, 13 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Sometimes, a story is just a story. But other times, it's much more. When Nathanael told King David a story about a rich man taking a poor man's little lamb, he was really talking about what David had done. Today, when Jesus tells a story, a parable, it's more than a story. And those who heard it knew it was about them. And they didn't like it one bit.

Now Jesus' story is simple, if not unbelievable. After all, no vineyard owner would send servant after servant to be so mistreated and abused. He would have taken action against those farmers much earlier. And after all that had happened, he certainly would not have sent his son. No, he would have destroyed those farmers and given the vineyard to others.

Now those hearing Jesus that day certainly didn't miss what He was saying. For God had often referred to Israel as His vineyard. One such reference is in Isaiah 5:

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. . . . What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? . . . The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress. (Isaiah 5:1-7).

God had chosen Israel to be His special possession. He expected them to bear good fruit, such as righteousness and justice. But so often His people bore only bad fruit. They rebelled against Him and worshiped other gods. They repeatedly forgot all that God had done for them, and they relied on their own righteousness. So for years, even centuries, God sent His prophets to call the people to give God what was due Him. That is, they condemned the people for their faithlessness and called them to repent of their sins and to turn to God in faith. But the people had beat, ridiculed, and mistreated God's servants time and time again.

And what did God do to those tenants, those leaders of Israel? Did He destroy them as they deserved? No! "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do?' I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him."

This is the stuff of fantasy, is it not? Such a thing would never happen in real life. For what owner would put up with this kind of behavior for so long? And then, after the cruel treatment of his servants, who would send his own son to risk the same sort of rejection and danger? But that's what this owner does. The Lord had put up with Israel's rebellious obstinacy for many centuries already. But instead of wiping them out, as He had the right to do long ago, the Lord was giving them one last chance. Now He was sending them His Son.

Here comes one even greater than the prophets: Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself. The one at whose baptism and again at His transfiguration the Father said, "This is my beloved Son." God's own Son comes to God's own people. They ought to respect Him. In His character, in His teachings, and in His miracles of healing, Jesus has clearly manifested Himself as the one sent from God. Surely Israel will respect Him!

But, no. Jesus was telling them that He knew what they were up to. He knew that they would throw Him out of the vineyard and kill Him. And those listening to Him knew He was talking about them, and it angered them. But they wouldn't repent. They were angered by the threat to their position and authority. The idea that the Owner of the vineyard "will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others" was not what they wanted to hear. That's why they wanted to kill Jesus. Indeed, that's why they did kill Jesus.

But in doing so, they didn't realize that they were fulfilling the parable. When they killed Jesus, they didn't realize that they were killing the vineyard Owner's Son. They didn't realize that their rejection of Jesus would lead to their being thrown out of the vineyard. They didn't realize that God would "kill them and give His vineyard to others." Yet, that's exactly what happened.

To those leaders, this was a parable of the Law. It was a Word of condemnation. Are we listening? Do we take God's Word to heart? Do we repent of our sins? Are we angry at what Jesus says? Do we mistreat His servants He sends to us? If so, we are the chief priests and scribes who sought to lay hands on Him to kill him.

Yet, because of their impenitence and unbelief and their rejection of Jesus, the vineyard has been entrusted to us. Thus this becomes a parable of the Gospel. It is a Word of God's grace. As God chose Israel of old, so He chooses His new Israel. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Indeed, we are the new Israel. We are God's vineyard. But too often we too fail to bring forth good fruit. At times, we too think of our church as "our" church. We forget that the church is God's. We forget that we are not the owners but only the trustees of His vineyard.

Yet, God still wants us to bring Him the fruits of His vineyard. But too often we don't deliver the goods. We don't use what God has given us to His glory. We don't return to Him His portion of our income. We don't give Him His portion of our time. We don't use our talents and skills in His service. We think that what we have is ours, not realizing that it all came from Him in the first place. We return as little as we think we can get away with.

So God continues to send servants to call us to repentance and to trust in Him and His promises. Even in our stubborn refusal to give to God what belongs to Him, He sends His Son to us to crush our self-righteousness and smash our self-justification. Jesus called the people of His day to repentance and faith, and He does the same for us. He gave His very life for that purpose. Through His death and resurrection He made it possible for us to be children of God and heirs of heaven. In your baptism you received the ability to be a fruit-bearing part of God's vineyard. "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:4).

Beloved, God is patient and merciful toward us! He sends us His messengers, with His message of mercy and forgiveness, week after week, year after year--even after we've blown it time and time again. "The Lord is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Oh, the longsuffering of our Lord, that He puts up with willful, obstinate sinners like you and me and holds off on His judgment toward us! But it will not last forever.

When the tenants saw the son coming, they said, "This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours." Ironically, it is in that very act of the Son's death that we do receive the inheritance! By His death on the cross, Christ gained these riches for us. Then in Holy Baptism you and I were joined to Christ and became heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. The inheritance is ours! Christ's righteousness, His status as beloved Son, His resurrection, and everlasting life in heaven--all these are part of the incredible inheritance we receive, purely out of God's mercy and grace and His fantastic love!

What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will destroy those who willfully remain in their sins, thus showing their rejection of Him. And He will continue to be patient and longsuffering toward us who know and acknowledge our sin, calling us to repentance and faith in His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Yes, God will continue to do everything for this vineyard of His, the Church, so that we produce the good fruits that He is looking for. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.