

Sermon for March 17, 2013 – Lent 5

Luke 20:9-19

**Theme: God's kindness and man's treachery in the vineyard.**

<sup>9</sup> He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. <sup>10</sup> At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. <sup>13</sup> "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' <sup>14</sup> "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>15</sup> So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" <sup>17</sup> Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." <sup>19</sup> The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Why are you a Christian? Do you come to worship simply as a matter of tradition, or is there more to it than that?

I have heard people say that the reason they do not come to worship is that they feel like they don't get anything out of the service. It is sad to hear people say such things – especially considering all that God freely offers us through the Gospel. But this opens up another question – do we only come to Church to get something? Put another way, do we really love God, or do we simply use him and his forgiveness for selfish gain? Do we view God as our "sugar daddy" - someone we will hang onto and pretend to love as long as we get the things we want from him? Why do we follow Christ?

On the Tuesday before his crucifixion, the Jewish leaders bombarded Jesus with questions, trying to find some evil to accuse him of, so that people would stop following him. Jesus told them a parable, which was meant to get them to consider their relationship with God. Let us consider our relationship with Jesus in the light of this parable, which reveals God's kindness and man's treachery in the vineyard.

Our text begins: [Jesus] *went on to tell the people this parable. "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.*

The man who planted the vineyard is God the Father and the vineyard he planted is His kingdom; his gracious rule in the hearts of believers. The LORD plants His kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel - the Gospel that creates faith in a person and declares Jesus Lord of his heart. The

tenants are the Jews and their religious leaders. God entrusted the Jews with the Gospel promise of the Savior (something pictured in almost every aspect of Jewish worship). They were its keepers. This promise marked them as God's chosen people.

Notice the kindness of the vineyard owner. From day one he wants to share the blessings - the fruits of his toilsome planting - with others; just as God wants to share his blessings with us.

*At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed.*

Vineyards produce fruit, but the owner had not received any from his vineyard. This is why he sent a servant to get some. What does this represent? Israel's history. God graciously chose Israel to be his own and blessed them with the promise of the Savior. This should have resulted in praise from their lips and faith in their hearts. But, time and time again, Israel's history shows, that they wandered away from God. They became jealous of other nations and their gods. Faith was missing from their hearts and God noticed.

This is why the LORD sent the prophets to Israel, to warn them of their sins and remind them of the wonderful promise of forgiveness that was theirs through faith. He wanted to see the fruits of repentance and faith. But what did the leaders of Israel do to the prophets God sent? They mistreated and ignored them. The people did not want to share their hearts with God. They were selfish.

*He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.*

The more time progressed, the worse Israel became. The people rejected God's call to repentance and faith. They refused to give God the fruits he desired. (cf. Matthew 23:29ff, Luke 11:47ff)

So far we have been talking about the Israelites, but what about us? God has graciously chosen and given us the very same promise of salvation that he gave the Jews. He has made us members of his Kingdom, his vineyard, by planting faith in our hearts through the Gospel. He shares his blessings with us, but do we share them back? Do we give Him the fruits He desires: heartfelt praise and thanks for his salvation - a life that is dedicated to serving Him? Or do we only look out for ourselves and keep such fruit from God?

How do we treat the servants God sends to us, who call us to produce fruits of repentance and faith? I am not just talking about the pastor here. Every Christian is God's servant. Anyone who comes to us with God's Word - calling us to repent and believe, is a servant God has sent to look for fruit in our lives. God's law shows us our sins. God's Gospel shows us our Savior. God's forgiveness motivates us to love him back and produce fruits of thanksgiving and obedience. Do we listen to the servants God sends us?

The Jews did not listen to the servants God sent them. So what did God do? Destroy them? No. *Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.*

What love and patience the owner exhibits. It seems unreal! And yet this is exactly the kind of love and patience God the Father had for the Jews. In love He sent his Son Jesus, not to condemn the Jews, but to remind them again of their position in His Kingdom and the love God exhibited in choosing them. Jesus came - not only to remind the Israelites of God's promised love – but to fulfill it!

*"But when the tenants saw [the Son], they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>15</sup> So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.*

How could the tenants be so stupid? How could anyone think that by killing a man's son, they would get his inheritance? But as improbable as this sounds, this is exactly what the Jewish leaders were up to. They plotted to kill Jesus. Why? Because they thought that once Jesus was out of the way, they would get the honor and attention He was receiving.

Again, before we think, "those wicked Jews," we should look at our own heart. God the Father has sent his Son to us through the Gospel, but how do we receive him? Do we receive him in faith and love – ready to listen to His Word whenever it is offered? Or do we consider coming to church a burden and the Bible a bore? Do not despise God's Word. If you despise the Gospel by ignoring it, if you despise God's Word by not taking the rebuke of a fellow Christian to heart, if you despise the Gospel by avoiding church and not partaking of the Sacraments, you are in danger of not only mistreating the LORD's servants, but also Jesus himself who actually comes to you through the Gospel. You are in danger of killing Jesus from your heart. And why? So that you can live in selfish, sinful pleasure – unbothered as you try to gain your inheritance of sin? May it never be! Lord, forgive us for the times we despise you and your word. Create in us pure hearts, O God, and restore unto us the joy of your salvation.

*"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."*

Here we see the God's wrath over against the selfish, treacherous, tenants. But that's not the only thing we see - we also see God's grace. Instead of closing up the vineyard, or keeping it all to himself, he gives the vineyard to others; and we are the others God gave this vineyard to. Our Epistle lesson made it clear that God used the unbelief and rejection of the Jews to bring His Gospel to us. He did this to both save us and to make the Jews jealous for the salvation they lost, so that they too would repent and believe in him for eternal life. But if they refuse to repent and believe in Jesus? Then they will fall under God's judgment – like anyone who refuses to believe in Christ. Jesus himself says: *"Then what is the meaning of that which is written: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'?" <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."*

What is a capstone? In an arch, it is the topmost stone that keeps the whole arch together. Without it, the arch would fall. In a building it is known as the cornerstone, the foundational stone upon which the whole structure is built.

The stone the Jewish leaders rejected is Jesus. God made him the chief cornerstone upon whom our entire faith rests. Some people just can't accept the fact that Jesus is God and our Savior from sin. They stumble over him and their faith is broken to pieces on Christ.

But then there are others who avoid Christ, who despise the salvation he offers, who walk away from his love. These are the ones who will be crushed under the Stone in the final judgment. How so? Because when they despised and rejected Jesus, there is no other salvation left for them. May the LORD keep us from falling under his wrath by despising Him. May we ever remain in His grace.

And God's grace is amazing. The LORD is patient and loving. He is forgiving. He adopted us into His family through the life, death and resurrection of his Son. We are selfish, but God is selfless. God has saved us in Christ and has given us an inheritance beyond our wildest imaginations. He has given us Himself!

So why are you a Christian? I am because God loves me and has overwhelmed me with his grace - so much so that I am a new creation: I can't help but love God back. When God made me a citizen of heaven, a branch attached to the vine of Christ, he breathed in me true life and true love. "And he has done the same for you!" How can we not share with him the fruits he so eagerly desires from the promises that he has entrusted to us? Fruits of praise, glory and honor be to our loving LORD. Amen.