

**Prayer of the Day:**

Eternal God and Father, help us to remember Jesus, who obeyed your will and bore the cross for our salvation that through his anguish, pain, and death we may receive forgiveness of sins and inherit eternal life; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

**Verse of the Day:**

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life for a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45 NIV)

**Sermon Text:**

Holy Week, it's just one week away now isn't it. Palm Sunday will be a bright spark of rejoicing after the long march of repentance the last several weeks. Jesus will enter Jerusalem triumphant and majestic, yet humble and despised. Monday will mark the exchange with the money lenders in the temple as Jesus drives them out with harsh words and the sting of a whip. Tuesday will mark his day of teaching, infuriating the Jewish religious leaders. Wednesday will mark Judas betrayal as the price is set and the money exchanged. Thursday we will gather again, to commemorate the night of the Supper, our Saviors teachings on service and his abandonment to the hands of his enemies. Good Friday will usher in the bloody scene once more leaving our hearts sorrowful over the sin that made the scene necessary yet joyful at the price that was paid to set us free. Then we will wait, wait for the joy of Easter morning, the empty tomb and the cry, "He is Risen!" Today, in our lesson we are coming to the end of Holy Tuesday. Jesus has already rebuked the Jewish leaders and now this parable. As we study his words, may the cry of the crowd that day be our earnest prayer **MAY THIS NEVER BE!**

**Text: Luke 20:9-19**

<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.

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The owner, God, had a vineyard the people of Israel, who he allowed to be tended by people learned and trained in the proper care of such things, Israel's leaders. He was not unfair in his treatment of them, in fact he gave them ample time to produce a crop before he demanded anything in return. But when he did return, to fulfill the arrangement they had agreed upon, the tenants beat his servants and not only one but many as God sent them.

What a picture of Israel and yet how true as we survey the scriptures. Think of the servants God so often sent to his people, Elijah (1 Kings 19) and Elisha (2 Kings 6:31) were hunted, Jeremiah was scorned for their preaching (Jeremiah 26:8, 38:6, and more), John the Baptist was beheaded (Mark 6:27,28). God had not been impatient with his people, He had promised grace and blessing for those who followed him, obeyed his commands. The people would rather follow their own ways and wallow in the filth of sin than listen to the multiple calls to repentance which those messengers had spoken.

Does this describe us? Oh I know we don't hunt the messengers of God in order to kill them, nor do we toss them into cisterns and demand their heads on platters, but do we despise the preaching of God's Word? What does it say to us that we are a congregation of 900 plus with a regular attendance for weekend worship around half of that and an ever dwindling attendance on Wednesdays? What about Bible Study which sits around 30 percent of our membership or teen bible class or Sunday school? What about when the message we hear isn't the one that makes us feel all warm and fuzzy inside, but downright guilty and sinful? Do we listen intently to our Lord as he calls for repentance or is it to personal? Do we become irritated when God would raid our vineyard and dare to ask for fruit?

Brothers and sisters, we are baptized children of God! We are no longer slaves to sin, destined to death and condemned to hell. Baptized into Christ, we are people of repentance and so as Lent draws ever closer to its conclusion, may we fall before our God sorrowful for the times we have despised his Word failing to follow his will and trusting in the promise that the blood of Christ covers it all and has washed us clean. Our cry is clear, **MAY THIS NEVER BE... THAT WE DESPISE GOD'S WORD!** As we speak of this cross, the parable continues.

<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 love we see displayed here by our God! It seems foolhardy almost doesn't it? When these people have done nothing but evil not to one servant but to three the owner, God himself, decided I will send my Son surely they will listen to him. We scream "No! These people will harm him too." God says, "I must, if there is the slightest chance that they will listen, He must go."

The outcome is appalling isn't it? The Son is killed tossed from the vineyard and the tenants think they will gain the inheritance in this action. As ridiculous as the reasoning is, this exact thought is brewing in the minds of the leaders of God's people as Jesus speaks the words. Soon in just 2 days they will seize Jesus and murder him on the cross.

What a gruesome picture this is, but what grace from our God. You see the owner was no fool, he not only expected that this would happen, he knew it, had foretold it (Isaiah 53) and sent

his Son anyway. Seem foolish, even wrong to the ear and the mind? It is exactly this action that provides the payment for your sins and mine. It is this action and the resulting treatment of those who would call themselves God's own that provides the perfect payment for our sins.

Lutherans have always announced that while we cannot earn or deserve our salvation we can refuse it. We can look at this picture of God's love and grace and decide it is simply to disgusting, to harsh, we can call it foolishness and unbelievable nonsense. Through faith, we will not. Through the gift of God's grace, displayed on the cross and winged into our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit we will cry out with the crowd **MAY THIS NEVER BE...THAT WE REJECT GOD'S LOVE** and face the consequences!

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Jesus' question is simple isn't it? What do you think will happen to those who **DESPISE GOD'S WORD** and **REJECT HIS LOVE**? His answer sends cold shivers down our spines, God will return will wipe out the wicked tenants and find others who will listen. God's wrath, His punishment will come on those who act this way.

He then goes further, He stares directly at his enemies and using a verse they common sang in praise and rejoicing rebukes them. They were those who had rejected the capstone of Christ. They would be those who were shattered and crushed. Their actions after Jesus' words proved it, no repentance, no faith, only hatred and a desire to rid themselves of this teacher whom the people were listening to.

Brothers and sisters, these are words of stern and real warning. To turn away from the wisdom of God, to despise his word and reject his love comes with consequences. Perhaps we think we are okay today and we have gotten away with it but God will come, come in wrath and punishment, remove his vineyard from our hands and place it into the hands of those who would listen to him.

After Israel the vineyard was handed over to the Gentiles – you and me. By God's grace, we are children of the owner. By God's gift of faith we listen to the word and rejoice in his love. As the Holy Spirit, continues to work in our hearts and minds through his means of grace, we will have no reason to fear the wrath of our God. Through His grace and by faith, we have become heirs through the death of His son, we have been purified, and through his resurrection we look forward to God's coming not in wrath but to take us to be with him in his heavenly vineyard for all eternity.

Lent is drawing steadily to a close. We will soon be deep in the contemplations of Holy Week and then life will continue on. May the lessons of lent which remind us of repentance, and the importance of grace, faith and the true glory of that gruesome cross remain with us not for a season but forever that our cry may be changed with the confidence of our faith... **MAY THIS NEVER BE ...** for I know that through faith in Christ, I am Free! Amen!