

Lesson: Matthew 21:33-43

³³ “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. ³⁸ “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹ “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? ⁴³ “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, in Your bountiful goodness, keep us safe from every evil of body and soul. Make us ready, with cheerful hearts, to do whatever pleases You; 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: Ephesians 2:10

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

Sermon Text:

Have you noticed that recurring theme over the last several Sundays? Two Sundays ago, the vineyard owner, God, invited people into the vineyard to do His work and then He paid them all the same wage, a fact that got a few of the workers grumbling. The lesson reminded us of the importance of God’s grace, His undeserved love, which hands you paradise, an eternity apart from the hours of your labor, the work of your hands. Last Sunday, in the Gospel lesson, we had those two sons. One said, “no” to Dad only to later repent and heed the request of his father, and the other sounded all sugar and spice and everything nice, only to refuse to do the work assigned him. Oh, did you catch where that work was to be done? Yep, in the father’s vineyard. Jesus used that lesson to teach us to value, the very air we Christians breathe by faith, repentance. And today, well, we are back in the vineyard. But if the other two parables seemed strange to you, then this one takes the cake.

Who in their right mind would do this? The first paragraph makes sense as our Landowner sets up a wonderful vineyard (think the last two Sundays' worth of lessons here). Prepared and ready, He hands it to those He has assigned to care for it and that’s when all seems to go so horribly wrong. The vinedressers revolt and kill those sent to collect the fruits of the vineyard. Isaiah says it so very well in our first lesson today, *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 5:7). God’s messengers, the prophets, had not been listened to. They had been treated terribly. The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us, ³⁶ *Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them* (Hebrews 11:36-38a).

“Wipe them out!” That was the cry of the Pharisee and the Sadducee, the scribes and priests who were listening to Jesus at the end of the parable. I’m already screaming it now. But not God! In a display of UNPRECEDENTED PATIENCE with those entrusted with the vineyard, He sends more servants, who are treated just like the first, and then the statement that makes you want to stand and scream “No, don’t do it!” The Owner sends His Son, the one and only, surely they would respect Him. But sin is a twisted mindset that thinks if only this One can be set aside, done away with, murdered, then its desires can prevail. What did Caiaphas, the High Priest, tell the Sanhedrin? *You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish* (John 11:50).

So the people cried for His blood, forced Him to carry the instrument of His own torture outside the city gates and there murdered my LORD, and every Lenten season I still join in with those listening to Jesus, *“Bring those wretches to a wretched end!”* Of course, that’s missing the point, isn’t it? Oh, I can shake my head and wag my

finger all I want to at the jealousy of the Jewish leaders whose hands carried out the deed, but the sending of the Son, well that was done just as much for me, for you, as it was for any of them. For you see, prophet after prophet comes to us and speaks to us in the pages of the Holy Scriptures, heard from pulpits and lecterns around our world. Yet, what does our God see as He peers into His vineyard, what fruits are evident? Jealousy, envy, greed, lust, malice, dishonesty: It's a refusal to listen to the messengers God sends to speak with us as we tightfistedly cling to everything as if it was all ours and not the possession of a loving Creator Who gives us all we need to do the work of His vineyard.

He should have just wiped us out. It was the only thing that makes any sense when one is met with such rebellion and the twisted attitudes of sin. That's the warning that is more than evident as we read this parable. ⁴² *Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"* ⁴³ *"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."* ⁴⁴ *He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."* That's a message that should give us pause and for that honest assessment we heard about last week.

However, there is another message we need to see in these words. It comes in the inconceivable actions of the landowner. In that **UNPARALLELED PATIENCE**, in never-ending grace, He continues to call out to us. He sends His Son! In blood, outside the vineyard, as the world, satan, and our own sin-twisted soul think they have wrestled all power from Him, Christ Jesus takes hold of us (Philippians 3:12), saves us, and calls sinners, saints.

It's mind-blowing, isn't it? Peter once said, *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). John announced, *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins* (1 John 4:10). And so once more today, we rejoice brothers and sisters in the forgiveness God grants, in the patience God displays, yes, to wicked servants like us.

Yet note something in this parable, something which ought to stiffen our backs and perk up our ears. Though God does not find it in Israel among wicked tenants who reject His Word, He still comes looking for fruit.

Oh, don't misunderstand me here, please listen attentively. My works will never earn me a place in heaven. Neither will yours. That can only be done and has been done only in the righteousness of Christ. Ah, but then the legalist will begin to creep forward again. Only moments after crying out over our sinful state, we find ourselves trying to prove our righteousness before the eyes of God.

Welcome to the struggle of Christian living. Trapped between self-loathing and self-righteousness, we constantly should be aware of one overwhelming fact, "I cannot do this on my own." But then we are not alone. Paul told the Galatians, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20)." God has every right to look for fruit among His people because lives filled with faith in His Son will produce it.

The Master of the vineyard, into which we have been so lovingly called, patiently does His work. He sets the wall of His law around us and gives us the watchtower of His Word so that we might be safe. In His love, in His patience, He makes sure that the vineyard is lacking nothing that it might produce abundantly according to His good and gracious will. When we find that our work has been selfish and sluggish as sin twists us into "me-motivated maniacs", He sends His Son. He doesn't just give us the ability to fight against, sin, Satan, and the world around us, He fights for us, defeating them even as He's dragged out of the vineyard to die that we might live.

That message, that gospel proclamation, is the plant, the vinedresser, and the glorious fruit. Planted by the work of the Holy Spirit through this Word of the promise in each of us, fruits of this faith in Christ will simply abound. Oh, there will be struggles for sure as our enemies refuse to admit that they are defeated, but they are. And on that final day, as the Owner of the vineyard returns calling all to account, another scene will play out, ³⁴ *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'* ³⁵ *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,* ³⁶ *I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* ³⁷ *"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'"* ³⁸ *When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?'"* ³⁹ *When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'"* ⁴⁰ *"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

God's vineyard is full of lessons for His beloved servants. There we see His grace on display. We marvel at the repentance which springs to life within each one of us. And today, faith heeds the warning and rejoices in the reality of God's **UNPARALLELED PATIENCE**. Amen!