

Isaiah 5:1-7 The beloved vineyard

Psalm 80:1-7 Hear O Shepherd of Israel

Hebrews 11:29-12:2 Jesus the Author and finisher of our faith

Luke 20:9-19 A man planted a vineyard he Parable of the Tenants

This parable, which is often called the parable of the tenants, or the parable of the vineyard, is a real challenge. The whole narrative is brutal and violent and one phrase is especially haunting, **“He will kill those tenants and give the Vineyard to others who will produce the fruit of it.”** This does not seem like Jesus meek and mild. This parable is also not an aberration. A version of this parable is found in three of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. So this was an important parable in the life of the early church. It is also not an aberration in Luke’s gospel. The violent end of this parable is not unlike several other of Luke’s parables. In the parable of the talents in Luke it ends with **“As for those slaves who did not want to see me as King, take them out and execute them in front of me”** Harsh. In another section of Luke, where Jesus warns of the second coming Jesus says **that if a servant is found not ready he will be cut off**, but that is a translator’s effort to soften it, it really says **that servant will be cut in two**. Harsh! The parables about the rich don’t end much better. **One rich man dies in the night, as God demands his soul, and the other dies and ends up in hell after neglecting the neighbor at his door**. In Acts, which Luke also wrote, a married couple in the early church lie about money they are giving to the church, and both of them are struck dead, and they carry their bodies out. So the context counts. Previous to this parable in Luke the religious leaders ask Jesus, **“From where do you get this authority”** Jesus asked them, **“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men”** They know if they say from heaven, Jesus will say then why don’t you listen to him. And they could not say from men, because the people loved John and they feared the people. Well this parable ends up in the very same phrase. **They wish to arrest him immediately, however “They fear the people”**.

So this entire parable is the stark answer of Jesus to the question of whether his work is legitimate. The underlying answer that Jesus gives for his authority, is that his Father, owns the vineyard. God created it, set it up, financed it, planted it and expects the those in charge of it to give a harvest of peace and justice and righteousness. But God does not get that response. Now it is really important here to understand that it is not the whole Jewish nation that is giving our Lord grief but it is the religious leaders. In the parable Israel is the vineyard, the tenants who take care of it are the religious leaders. At the end of the parable when Jesus says, **the vineyard will be given to another**, the word for other is ‘another like you’ not another who is different. So I don’t this this parable is about giving the Kingdom, to gentiles or transferring the promises of Israel to the gentiles, as some have taken it. It is about giving the vineyard to more responsible Jewish leaders. All of those early leaders of the early church were Jewish, including Paul and all the apostles.

So where is the good news in this truly challenging parable? There are real signs of grace here. *First* God gives the leaders many chances, three visits are narrated, which in Jewish Scriptures is a symbol for a a lot of chances. *Second* God, we can see from the Isaiah passage fully equips the vineyard with all the bells and whistles. So those in charge are given every advantage. *Third* God **sends his Son, his beloved son**, the best he has and it is a real risk he is taking these folks have been hostile and violent. And in a final hostile and violent act they kill Jesus.

So many scholars, wrongly say this is the judgement of the Jewish nation and we gentiles can be smug for we have inherited the promises. I don’t think that is true. This parable applies to any who have been given the good things of God, and that includes all of us. Think about the physical creation, **truly the whole earth is full of the Lord and his beauty**. It is a wonderful place. And God expects us to treat it well, and produce food for the hungry, and homes for

the homeless. Instead we have devastated the earth through global warming. The good news is we have been warned about this. I saw when our speaker was here a report given to Lyndon Johnson in the 60's which outlines the consequences and threats of global warming. However like in the parable of the vineyard there may come a time when it is too late. How about economic justice? The scriptures scream literally hundreds of times about the importance of caring for the poor and needy. We are encouraged over and over again to do this. We are given chances, over and over again. The scriptures speak of the rewards of such economic justice, and the serious consequences of neglecting it. Is this a priority with the leadership in our country? Is there a time when there is no turning back? I do not know So grace abounds because our Lord provides the means, and constantly reminds us of our role in his mission. However what does seem harsh is that there is time when its too late. The final word of judgment is spoken. However, that final word is **the word of Christ who died for us. Jesus here says, Have you not heard the saying, The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, the one who stumbles over it will be broken, and on whom it falls will become like dust in the wind.**

Jesus is not trying to hurt us, he is giving us a chance to build upon the rock. This is the same message he echoed from the sermon on the mount when he says, **Anyone who listens to my words is like man who built upon a rock and he who does not listen to my words builds upon the sand, and when the rains came, and they will come, his house washed away.** That is truly a message of love, because it real. Love is not shallow but powerful and unfailing and that is what God shows us in the gospel and in this story. At Trinity let's be part fo the story the real story about real people.