

October 8, 2023  
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 21:33-46 (Isaiah 5:1-7)

GRAFTED INTO GOD’S VINEYARD, IN HIS KINGDOM, BY THE GRACE OF JESUS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

They say that the definition of insanity is doing the exact same thing over and over again, while expecting different results. While this statement may be true in practical applications, it doesn’t hold fast for Biblical parables. Never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to change stone-cold hardened sinful hearts to lifesaving faith in Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel text this morning is a continuation of Jesus’ conversation with the Jewish religious leaders that we heard last week. It’s Holy Week. Two days earlier, Jesus rode into Jerusalem seated on a donkey. His disciples were praising and hailing Him with shouts of:

***“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*** (Matthew 21:9)

Others were merely watching the spectacle. But the Pharisees and the religious leaders see Him as a threat to their own position of power among the people and are seeking a way to kill Him.

Over the next two days Jesus would cleanse the temple of the merchants and moneychangers. He would heal the blind and the lame came to Him and when the religious leaders saw the wonderful things that He did, they were indignant. Finding no figs on a fig tree, He cursed the tree and it immediately withered. As He made His way into the temple the chief priests and the elders had seen enough. They came up to Him as He was teaching, and said:

***“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”*** (Matthew 21:23)

But they’d already witnessed proof of Jesus’ authority throughout His earthly ministry, His powerful preaching and teaching, His miraculous healings, casting out demons, and the raising of the dead. They are the works of **God** that only **God** can do – and somewhere in their hardened hearts the chief priests and elders knew it. But by admitting that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, they would be giving up their earthly power and influence.

So, Jesus teaches a parable that is not included in our text. (cf: Matthew 21:28–32) A parable of a man with two sons who tells them to go and work in the vineyard that day. One answers: *“I will not go”* but changes his mind and goes. The other son says that he **will go**, but changes his mind and **doesn’t go**. Jesus asks the religious leaders:

***“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the***

***prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”*** (Matthew 21:31–32)

Jesus had trapped them. Neither son is totally obedient in doing the father’s will. Jesus’ point is – these leaders refused to believe John even after seeing the tax collectors and prostitutes come to faith. Instead of turning in repentance, Jesus’ opponents not only reject the preaching of John, they reject the One whose way he prepared. And without giving them a chance to reply Jesus launches into the parable in our text to make them see their depravity, wickedness, and sinfulness.

The parable sounds similar to God’s love song to His chosen nation, Israel, sung through His prophet Isaiah seven hundred years earlier, which you heard in our Old Testament reading. (cf: Isaiah 5:1–7) God is described as a landowner who spares no expense planting a vineyard, building a watchtower, and digging a wine press. The vineyard is a picture of Israel whom God had chosen to be His treasured possession out of all the peoples on earth. (cf: Deuteronomy 14:2) He led them out of bondage in Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey where God Himself would dwell with them in the temple. Even while they were a stubborn and stiff-necked people, God provided everything they needed: protection from their enemies, forgiveness of sins, and giving them to be tenants and stewards of the Promised Land. And best of all – He promised to send them the Messiah. A Savior.

But the love song quickly turns into a song of indictment upon the vineyard... a condemnation of God’s chosen people. Rather than bearing fruits of repentance and fruits of the spirit, they produced wild grapes, an analogy for all kinds of sin such as idolatry, injustice, and impenitence. In return, God would remove His protection from them, allowing His vineyard to be broken into pieces and His people destroyed.

In Jesus’ parable, instead of speaking to the entire nation of Israel, He aims His words directly at the chief priests and the elders. It sounds as if He’s preaching the same parable, while expecting different results. He tells of a vineyard, a tower, and a wine press. The owner of the vineyard is God. The vineyard is the Christ’s Church. This vineyard lacks nothing. The Owner, God the Father, has given it everything it needs.

But the religious leaders were bearing the fruit of their ancestors... they were bearing wild grapes. With their holier-than-thou attitudes, they were confident in their prestige and power. They were complacent in their ability to keep their watered-down version of God’s Law. They had blinded themselves to God’s prophesy and rejected His promises.

Jesus’ parable was to remind them of their nation’s history of spurning God, reminding them of prophet after prophet, God’s servants, sent into His vineyard Israel, calling them to turn back to Him, calling for the fruits of the vineyard, the fruit of repentance, calling for faith in God and trust in His promises. But time and time again they took the Lord’s prophets, beating one, killing another, and stoning another.

Any ordinary landowner would never send more servants into the vineyard to be injured or killed. But God’s ways are not our ways. In His rich mercy, He is slow to anger and abounding

in steadfast love. He desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (cf: 1 Timothy 2:4) So He would send more prophets into His Vineyard. He would send the second to the last prophet, John the Baptist, to warn them:

***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** (Matthew 3:2)

He would even send the final prophet, His only begotten Son, Jesus, to proclaim:

***“... repent and believe in the gospel.”*** (Mark 1:15)

God’s love is unwavering. Over the centuries the Lord of the Church has continued to send men into His vineyard to bring forth a harvest through the preaching of His Word. First the apostles and then preachers, sent to proclaim, yet only to be abused, beaten, and some martyred.

The reaction to God’s message is still the same today. People say: [Sarcasm on →] *“Yes, pastor, I know I’m supposed to love my neighbor as myself, but my neighbor is unlovable.” “Pastor, I know my kids need to be in church, but Sunday is our only day to sleep late. It’s hard getting the kids dressed and around.” “Pastor, I know God promises to provide and I’m supposed to my tithe my first fruits to the church, but what if I get laid off from my job?”* The list goes on.

Satan loves planting seeds of doubt and creating divisions in the Church. He loves to whisper in your ear, *“Did God actually say \_\_\_\_\_.”* He did it within the children of Israel as they wandered in the desert. He did it among the chief priests and Pharisees. And he does it in the church today. No one likes to be shown the mirror of the Law. No one likes to think that they’re a sinner. No one likes to think that hell is a real place for those who don’t trust in Jesus. It’s much easier to believe that good people doing good things will go to heaven. But those tenants will be put out of the vineyard and receive the fruits of their labors in due season.

God remains patient and long suffering. He’s the owner of the Vineyard who sent His very own Son, the final Prophet, into the world. Jesus came as servant, as messenger, and as Sole Heir to the Kingdom. St Peter confessed that:

***“[Jesus is] the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** (Matthew 16:16)

It would be upon the rock of this confession that Christ would build His Church.

***“... and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*** (Matthew 16:18)

As Jesus foretold in His parable, the tenant Jewish authorities would reject Him. Jesus didn’t fit into their narrative. He wasn’t the king they wanted. As sure as the tenants in the parable threw the owner’s son out of the vineyard and killed him, so too, the authorities would take God’s Son out of Jerusalem and put Him to death on the cross. They rejected the Stone that would become the Cornerstone. (cf: Matthew 21:42)

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus sent out His apostles into the Vineyard, to all nations, to Baptize and teach everything He commanded. (cf: Matthew 28:20) In the months following, St Peter stood before the Jewish leaders and said:

***“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*** (Acts 4:11–12)

From that day to this day and unto the Last Day, God's spokesmen continue to Baptize and teach all that Christ has commanded. Never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to change stone-cold hardened sinful hearts to lifesaving faith in Jesus Christ who is:

***"... the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*** (Hebrews 12:2)

Eternal salvation comes only through the crucified, dead, and risen Christ Jesus. Not through Allah or Mohammad or Confucius, or Krishna, or any other name. Salvation is in Christ alone, apart from your works and deeds. The Lord of the Church, as Owner of the Vineyard, continues to send out His servants, His called and ordained servants of the Word, to preach the Word and to administer His Sacraments, so that His Vineyard, the Church and her members bear good fruit, fruits in keeping with repentance, fruits of faith by loving and serving others just as God in Christ loves and serves you.

By His rich mercy and grace God has grafted you in His Vineyard, the Church for the sake of Jesus' innocent suffering and death. It's a land flowing with milk and honey where He supplies all that is needed to nurture repentant faith. He has built a wall around you and has set you apart in Holy Baptism. He has sent pastors, watchmen in His tower, to warn you of the dangers of sin and to proclaim the Gospel so that the Holy Spirit strengthen and keep you in the true faith. He has dug in His winepress to feed and nurture you in body and soul in His Holy Supper.

The parable sounds like insanity, doing the same thing over again, expecting different results. Except this time Jesus got the last word when He said:

***"It is finished."*** (John 19:30)

God raised Him from the dead and placed Him as the cornerstone of His Church. Because of Jesus' death, you are in the vineyard, and you're forgiven of all your sins. You have been freed to bear good fruit, fruits in keeping with repentance, fruits of faith by loving and serving others just as God in Christ loves and serves you.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.