

The Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2020

Isaiah 5:1-7

Philippians 3:4b-14

Matthew 21:33-46

Do you know someone who is OCD? Rafael Nadal is one of the greatest tennis players ever. He certainly seems OCD on the court. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is a very real mental affliction that can have a negative effect on a person's life and so I don't mean to unkindly laugh at what is a genuine burden for some. On the lighter side, Rafa goes through a series of routines between every point that must have the effect of calming him down, putting his mind at ease and thus allow him to focus entirely on the ball. For his pre-service ritual, he pushes his hair back behind his ears on each side, touches his nose and yanks at his shorts in personal places and after all that, he's ready. When leaving the court, he crosses the sidelines with his right foot only and never steps on it. His opponent must cross the net first whenever they change ends. I love it.

I have a high regard for OCD people. OCD people make the best neighbors, the best co-workers, and the best gardeners. Why? Because they are meticulous. Meticulous: "Showing great attention to detail; very careful and precise." Obviously, you can overdo it; if you focus on the inconsequential. Alise and I had a rug with fringes on the ends and I found myself always straightening the fringes – that had to stop. Meticulous; obsessive compulsive folks are meticulous. God is meticulous. Boy howdy, is God meticulous! In a glorious, beautiful, self-giving way – overlooking no detail, ensuring that everything is marvelously in order, our blessed Lord is the very definition of thorough. His church; that is what He gardens. With an obsessive grace, with love's divine compulsion, God is attentive to every aspect of His Kingdom, His vineyard, His church. And He gives it to you. He places the life of His Son... in you. As an example of what He has done for you, look to the OT and the Israelites.

His work, all His work; He brought them out of slavery in Egypt, He delivered them from their enemies, He guided them through the desert and fed them with supernatural food – and then He brought them into the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. God gave Israel the beauty of His Torah (His Word), He protected them from a multitude of threats and He shared His holiness with them (giving them the Temple, the sacrificial system, the priesthood). It was all a prelude of what He would do through His Son; it is a genuine portrait of what He has given to you. A meticulous gift; nothing missing or second rate – like a heavenly garden with every plant in place, every blade of grass standing tall. But what He gives is not so much material. What He gives is life. What He gives is salvation. What He gives is His Son. It's all meticulously perfect.

When Jesus told the parable that you heard a moment ago, it was devastating to those who hated Him. But this is not just a story that depicts the spiritual struggle that was going on then. This parable helps you see your life aright. Why is that? Because God and His vineyard has not changed. Because humanity has not changed. The same variables, the same issues surround us as well. Wisdom dictates that we see what is there to be seen.

God spared no expense in giving the vineyard His love. He then went looking for fruit. Start there; God looks for fruit. In His church, in you, and in me. He looks for justice; He looks for

charity, brotherly love, defending the vulnerable, He looks for honesty, temperance, chastity, and a sacrificial spirit. God looks for fruit, good fruit. He looks for us putting others needs above our own; putting aside your pride and cultivating humility. He looks for faith. God looked for fruit in Israel and all He found was “wild grapes;” inferior fruit that does not reflect the effort the beloved put into the vineyard.

Does God have the right? To look for fruit, I mean; does He have the right? Are you aware, concerned that He is looking for the fruit of repentance, the fruit of recognition that you are to turn away from sin and produce the fruit that reflects Christ and His life? In the OT lesson, God speaks a word of judgment through Isaiah. “I will remove its hedge.” That means that the vineyard will be vulnerable now to outside attack, the wall will be broken down, it won’t be pruned, thorns will grow. The vineyard cannot take care of itself. God’s protective hand was removed and the vineyard became a waste; neglected, it grew desolate. Yes, God has a right to look for fruit. He loves to find fruit. The fruit that He loves to find it that which reflects His Son. After all that He has done for the vineyard, He expects to find it.

In His parable, Jesus says that the master of the house did everything imaginable in establishing a beautiful vineyard. Is that not Christ’s church? All that we have, all that Christianity brings us – hope, joy, purpose, peace, freedom, forgiveness, security, love, support, truth – is that not the ideal setting for the production of virtue? What’s the fruit we present to Him? Fidelity to His church, fidelity to Christ and His Word, fidelity to one another. Jesus told the parable to expose His enemies – the religious rulers of the time. They had defied God. They despised His prophets. They despised grace. They produced the wild grapes of works righteousness. They stubbornly refused to repent. They stubbornly refused to abandon their worthless ways and turn in humble faith toward God and His Christ. The master of the house had only “leased” the vineyard to the tenants. It was mutiny in the vineyard.

The owner of the vineyard sounds like He is out of His mind. The wicked tenants had abused the servants, killing some of them. Now the Master intends to send His Son – whom He loves... to that wretched rabble? The wicked tenants hatch a wicked plan. Murder! Kill the heir. Keep the vineyard. Run our own racket. Jesus told the parable to illustrate the very plot that He was stepping into. The Pharisees were indeed planning on killing the Son of God, the Son of the Master of the Vineyard. Four days later they did precisely that. They meant it for evil. God meant it for good. Jesus crucifixion is the hedge that protects this vineyard. When you go out into our courtyard, when you linger over the things of the LWML and the mission of Christ’s church, look at the hedge around our courtyard and see something new – see the protection of Jesus’ death and resurrection which protects our church, which protects you and your life. He is your hedge, He is the wall of salvation around your heart, He is the Mighty Fortress which forever protects congregations like ours. He is risen and He is obsessed with protecting us.

Jesus produced the fruit that God is looking for. The fruit of forgiveness dangled from the holy cross. He is the tree of life. You now eat the fruit of His body; you drink the wine of His blood. He is the vine that has wrapped itself around your soul. He is the One who makes your believing soul fruitful. His love is in you. His charity is in you. His temperance, His chastity, His humility, His sacrificial spirit – it is all in you. He is marvelously obsessed with the care of His church. He withholds nothing from us. He rejoices to find the fruit of faith in this place and find

it He does. Christ the King Lutheran Church is an ongoing parable of grace. Christ's life is lived here, among us. May this vineyard ever be fruitful – to the glory God alone.