

The Fifth Sunday in Lent – 2022

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:4b-14

Luke 20:9-20

What happened to those tenants? What happened to those guys? In between when the owner of the vineyard leased the vineyard to the tenants and when the owner sent a servant to collect some of the fruit, *something* happened. What happened to those ole' boys?

This is a historical parable. Jesus tells a story that hits hard. Those who were hit with the broadside of this parable took it on the chin. Jesus tells this parable to those who were already intent on spilling His blood. When they heard it, they doubled down on their plan. When the Lord told this parable, He was telling the Jewish religious establishment something on the sly. What He told them was this: "I know what you're up to. Ultimately, your murderous plan is going to go badly for you."

The historical part is fairly simple. God gives His church to some people who are supposed to take care of it. In the OT, God's church is basically coterminous with the nation Israel. The Lord Himself established the vineyard – He delivered Israel out of Egypt, He settled them in the Promised Land, He gave Israel the Torah, the sacrificial system (their worship life where He shared His holiness with them). He gave them the priesthood, the Temple, the Sabbath and all the Feast Days on their liturgical calendar to help them remember His grace, His covenant, His providence, His Life. Such love He lavished upon Israel, such devotion, such meticulous care for His people! The worship which He gave to Israel enriched their lives; it was elegant, inspiring, faith-building, a marvelous revelation of who He is and what He would ultimately do in and through His Son. Take care of it! That was His command, His directive, His expectation – take care of it! It will be great blessing to the people and I am deeply interested in the peoples' well-being. All that I have given you for their spiritual well-being; take care of it!

Those to whom the Lord leased the vineyard were the religious authorities in Israel – the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, the scribes, the Pharisees (experts in the Law). These men were to govern God's church, govern God's nation, govern God's people... according to God's design. Like a foreman in a factory; like an Attorney General in a big city; like a lieutenant on the battlefield; the foreman doesn't decide what to build or how to build it, he just oversees the ones doing the job. The Attorney General doesn't make law, he is just to see that the law is upheld and perpetrators are prosecuted fairly. The lieutenant doesn't draw up the battle plan, he just carries it out, overseeing the contingent of men under his authority. What happened to those guys? What happened to the religious authorities that God left in charge of His vineyard?

We are coming to the time in the church year when we are confronted by the hate of unbelief. There are those who intentionally crucified an innocent man; One whom they *knew* was sent from God. For us believers, this is a difficult to grasp. There is one thing you must remember about the Scriptures, about the narrative of Christ's life, His interaction with humanity: what we see in the narrative of God's Word then is ongoing now. Unbelief still animates the hatred of those who reject God, those who reject His Son, reject His Word, who reject Christ's church. St. Paul speaks stark words: "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with

tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19).

What happened to those guys? What happened to the tenants in the parable – to turn them against the landowner and inspire their hatred, their violence? What happened to Cain? Before he killed his brother, God had warned him: “Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7). What happened to Aaron? Moses was on the Mountain, speaking with God, and the people clamored for an idol, a god of gold to worship. Aaron fashioned a golden calf and the people got religious: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” And Aaron built an altar before it (Genesis 32:4-5).

Faith is such a precious gift, the gift you possess. It can go sideways. Our sinful nature is ever present, waiting to corrupt what is good for whatever it *wants* to hear, whatever it *wants* to feel, whatever it *wants* to think, whatever it *wants* to believe. Enemies of the cross are constantly seeking converts. Darkness is creeping into every aspect of our culture. Supposed “experts” are promoting notions that are destructive to us, ideas that corrupt children, that violate common sense. Are we really unable to say what a woman is? Whose world is this? Who gave you your life, your intellect, your talents, the resources you rely on? Do you trust the One who gave you these things or the “experts” who rebel against Him? What happened to those guys? I’ll tell you what happened to them – they defied the living God; little at first, perhaps; and it grew. Believing that they could be masters of their own domain, they wanted to evict the King of Glory and rule in His place. If that sounds demonic, if that sounds like Satan’s defiance in heaven then your ears are sharp. Defiance is all around us, and if you think that you are not vulnerable to such claptrap then you are mistaken.

Jesus spoke that parable to inspire them to repent. They thought that they could do whatever they wanted and that there would be no repercussions. They killed the heir. Holy fright; they are insane. Those who the Lord set over His people Israel corrupted God’s Word, attempted to establish their own worldly empire, and, when God sent prophets who spoke His Word with clarity, they abused them (killing some of them). God was looking for fruit – for love, and mercy, and justice, and goodness, and charity, and grace. He finally sends His Son. And they crucify Him. A radical unbelief, a radical arrogance, a radical sense of autonomy – man crucified God.

Jesus’ parable has a strong sense of judgment. This is the verdict: unbelief does not win. By crucifying the Lord Christ, by their act of unrepentant rejection of the Messianic King, they actually act to ensure that He is the Victor – Christus Victor. Crucified, the Lord establishes His eternal dominion. He reigns from the tree. “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Matthew 21:42). God’s glory is supremely manifested in the rejection of God’s Son. Do you think that that has any bearing whatsoever on the times in which we live? His desire to save us cannot be thwarted by the vanity of men. His glory as the Giver of life and the Source of all that is good cannot be diminished by hatred, by unbelief, by any attempt to usurp His divine authority. It can’t be done! How does that make you feel? I’ll tell you how it makes me feel. It breathes confidence into my heart. It reminds me that nothing can separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. It calms my spirit when all around me I see cultural distress. It assures me that no one can snatch me out of the Nail Pierced Hand of Christ. And as

a pastor, it delights me to know that you, the beloved sheep of Christ's flock here at Christ the King, that you are safe, protected, firmly ensconced in Jesus' death and resurrection.

We know who the owner of the Vineyard is. He took away those wicked tenants and gave His church to His disciples, the apostles, who anchored the people of God to the Lord Christ by proclaiming His word in truth and purity. We are blessed to be in such a vineyard. Christ's church is a wonderful vineyard, full of the fruit of His tree, His cross – mercy, love, charity, grace, humility, fidelity, repentance, forgiveness, hope, and faith. We know what has happened to us. We have been recreated, renewed, born again, born from above – born by Water and the Spirit, born into a hope that does not fade. We are in Christ. His life has invaded our own and we are in Him. His righteousness is our delight. Our own good works and the trappings of this life are rubbish compared to knowing Christ. Christ is our cornerstone. On Him alone we build. In fact, God has planted the vineyard of His Son right here, among us, on the corner of Ford and South streets. The fruit of our salvation belongs to Him. The fruit of our lives, all that we are and have, we gladly give to Him. We know what has happened to us. We have been saved by the blood of Christ.