

October 4, 2020 🍷 18th Sunday after Pentecost

## Call to Confession

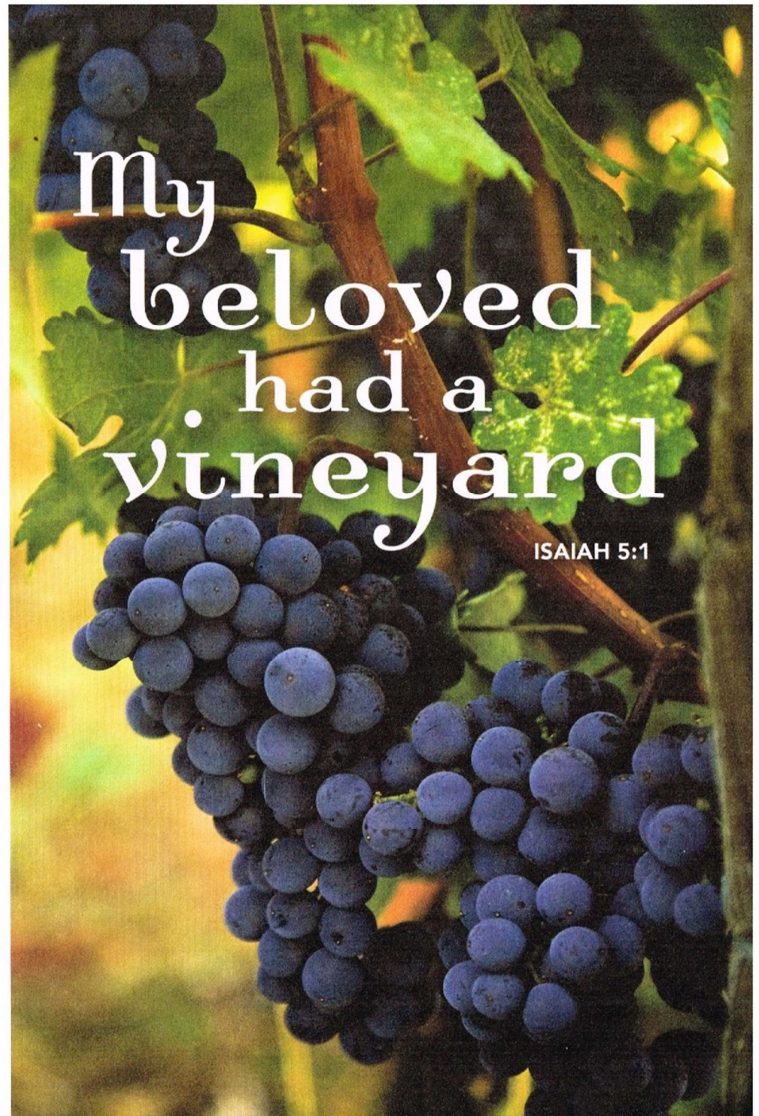
Throughout his ministry in Matthew's gospel, Jesus draws in people at the margins of society. As the leader of a reform movement, Jesus spoke as a Jew to fellow Jews. When we read these stories centuries later, we must remember that his intent was to condemn exclusion and abuses of power—not to reject Judaism. His critiques still ring true for the power structures of the religious institutions of our time.

Jesus' parables stirred people up, provoking questions, doubts, even hostility. When his listeners recognized themselves in the parables, it was rarely comforting or affirming. Do we have the honesty and vulnerability to see ourselves critically in the stories as the chief priests and Pharisees did?

There aren't any clear heroes in this story, as in any story of class warfare. Perhaps the tenants turned to violence out of frustration with the economic injustice of their situation. The Pharisees were quick to side with the powerful landowner, asserting his right to kill the tenants and crush their revolt, yet Jesus does not affirm this escalation either.

We begin worship with a prayer of confession, recalling the image of God's goodness in each of us and yet honestly admitting our shame and guilt. Today's parable also issues a call to confession, alluding to the vineyard of Isaiah 5, which yielded wild grapes instead of sweet. God has created a world that can provide abundant life for all. What are the fruits of our congregations? God's heart longs for justice for all people. How might we unintentionally and unknowingly cultivate the sour wine of exclusion, discrimination, and injustice?

In the prayer of the day, we ask: "Beloved God, . . . lead us . . . to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them." Empowered by God's grace and forgiveness, we set to work removing the blinders that keep us from recognizing ourselves in parables' antagonists and repenting of the injustices that we perpetuate.



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# Celebrate

Sunday, October 4, 2020  
18th Sunday after Pentecost

*In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells a vineyard parable, which serves as an image of Israel, the prophets' mission, and Christ's death. For Christians, the vineyard also speaks of God's love poured out in the blood of Christ, given to us for the forgiveness of sin. Grafted onto Christ the vine at baptism, we are nourished with wine and bread so that we may share Christ's sufferings and know the power of his resurrection.*

## Prayer of the Day

Beloved God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## First Reading

Isaiah 5:1-7

*The prophet sings a sad, parable-like love song about the relationship between God and Israel. In this song Israel is compared to a promising vineyard. Despite God's loving care, the vineyard that is Israel has brought forth "wild grapes" of injustice and distress, when fine grapes of justice and righteousness were expected.*

Let me sing for my beloved  
my love-song concerning his  
vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard  
on a very fertile hill.  
<sup>2</sup>He dug it and cleared it of stones,  
and planted it with choice vines;  
he built a watchtower in the midst  
of it,  
and hewed out a wine vat in it;  
he expected it to yield grapes,  
but it yielded wild grapes.

<sup>3</sup>And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and people of Judah,  
judge between me  
and my vineyard.

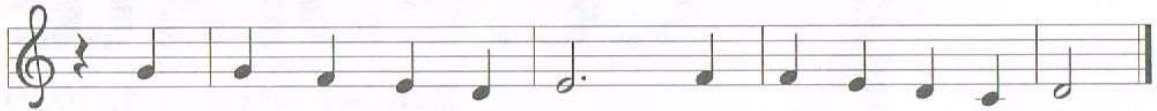
<sup>4</sup>What more was there to do for my  
vineyard  
that I have not done in it?  
When I expected it to yield grapes,  
why did it yield wild grapes?

<sup>5</sup>And now I will tell you  
what I will do to my vineyard.  
I will remove its hedge,  
and it shall be devoured;  
I will break down its wall,  
and it shall be trampled down.  
<sup>6</sup>I will make it a waste;  
it shall not be pruned or hoed,  
and it shall be overgrown with briers  
and thorns;  
I will also command the clouds  
that they rain no rain upon it.

<sup>7</sup>For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
he expected justice,  
but saw bloodshed;  
righteousness,  
but heard a cry!

Psalm

Psalm 80:7-15; refrain, Ps. 80:14, 15



Look down from heav'n, O God; be - hold and tend this vine.

Restore us, O <sup>1</sup> God of hosts;

let your face shine upon us, and we <sup>1</sup> shall be saved.

<sup>8</sup>**You have brought a vine <sup>1</sup> out of Egypt;  
you cast out the nations and <sup>1</sup> planted it.**

<sup>9</sup>You cleared the <sup>1</sup> ground for it;  
it took root and <sup>1</sup> filled the land.

<sup>10</sup>**The mountains were covered <sup>1</sup> by its shadow  
and the towering cedar trees <sup>1</sup> by its boughs. **R****

<sup>11</sup>You stretched out its tendrils <sup>1</sup> to the sea  
and its branches <sup>1</sup> to the river.

<sup>12</sup>**Why have you broken <sup>1</sup> down its wall,  
so that all who pass by pluck <sup>1</sup> off its grapes?**

<sup>13</sup>The wild boar of the forest has <sup>1</sup> ravaged it,  
and the beasts of the field have <sup>1</sup> grazed upon it.

<sup>14</sup>**Turn now, O <sup>1</sup> God of hosts,  
look <sup>1</sup> down from heaven;**

<sup>15</sup>behold and <sup>1</sup> tend this vine;  
preserve what your right <sup>1</sup> hand has planted. **R**

## Second Reading

## Philippians 3:4b-14

*Paul reviews some of his supposed credentials, which no longer have any bearing in comparison to the right relationship he has been given through the death of Christ. The power of Christ's resurrection motivates him to press on toward the ultimate goal, eternal life with Christ.*

[Paul writes:] If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup>Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup>More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the

law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

## Gospel

## Matthew 21:33-46

*Jesus tells a parable to the religious leaders who are plotting his death, revealing that their plans will, ironically, bring about the fulfillment of scripture.*

[Jesus said to the people:] "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>34</sup>When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. <sup>35</sup>But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup>Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup>Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup>But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' <sup>39</sup>So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup>Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" <sup>41</sup>They said to

him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?'

<sup>43</sup>Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. <sup>44</sup>The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

<sup>45</sup>When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup>They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

## Prayers of Intercession

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The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

*A brief silence.*

In all the world, give your church unity. Inspire all the baptized with the mind of Christ. Where the church is powerful and where it struggles, shape us with humility and obedience so that your love may be at work in us. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Your Son took on all of bodily life in our world, even to death. Preserve and keep your creation, O God. Mend and redeem places that are polluted and damaged, so that all of creation confesses you as Lord. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Turn the nations toward life. Where our ways are unfair, give us new hearts and new spirits. Where sin permeates our cultures and institutions (*especially*), change our minds and teach us to trust your authority. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Our lives are yours, O God. Relieve the suffering of those who are ill in body, mind, or spirit. Defend the lives and welfare of children who are abused or neglected, hungry or exploited, bullied or lonely. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Turn this congregation away from our own interests toward the interests of others. Fill us with your compassion and sympathy. Bless ministries of care in our community (*especially*); make us into signs of your mercy and justice for our neighbors. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Thank you for those who have gone into the kingdom ahead of us—tax collectors and prostitutes, likely and unlikely, obedient and slow to learn. By their witness, teach us to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in life and in death. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## Preparing for Next Week

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**Monday** Psalm 28. **Tuesday** (Michael and All Angels) Revelation 12:7-12. **Wednesday** (commemoration of Jerome, translator, teacher, died 420) Judges 16:23-31. **Thursday** Psalm 80:7-15. **Friday** Philippians 2:14-18; 3:1-4a. **Saturday** Jeremiah 6:1-10. **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost** (commemoration of Francis of Assisi, renewer of the church, died 1226; Theodor Fliedner, renewer of society, died 1864) Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:7-15; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46.

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