**Being Fruitful Tenants**

October 8, 2023, Thanksgiving

Matthew 21: 33-46 Russell Mitchell-Walker

In 2019, the Canadian government purchased the Trans Mountain pipeline for $4.5 billion from Kinder Morgan Canada Inc after the company threatened to scrap the pipeline expansion project due to environmentalist and indigenous opposition and political uncertainty. This was done at a time when we are supposed to be looking for ways to reduce our production and consumption of fossil fuels to reduce our emissions to keep the global temperature below a 1.5°C increase from industrial levels. Since this purchase, the cost of the project to the government has [soared from](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/trans-mountain-pipeline-costs-1.6775415) 21.4 billion in early 2022 to 30.9 billion in March this year. It seems to some that this was an irresponsible decision by the government, the powers that be, whom we have entrusted to manage our country and its’ resources. Is this really going to bear fruit for the country, for the world? Jesus might have a similar challenge to our government about this as he did to the religious authorities of his time.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus tells a parable about tenants of a vineyard who, instead of passing the harvest over to the landowner, killed the servants and then his son, to try and secure the harvest for themselves. Jesus asks the chief priests and scribes listening, what should that landowner do with the tenants? They respond that they should be killed and the vineyard given to tenants who will be more responsible and give the harvest to the landowner. Jesus then challenges them that the kingdom will be taken away from them and given to those who can be more responsible in producing fruits of the kingdom. The religious authorities realize Jesus is talking about them, that they are the tenants in the story, and want to arrest him but cannot because of the crowds. Jesus’ challenge to them in this parable and the previous one about two sons, each who do the opposite of what they said they would do when asked, indicates that they are not living out God’s will. We know from Jesus’ previous teachings and actions that he understands God’s will to include being loving and compassionate to those in need, ensuring that everyone is cared for and has enough, that they are paid enough to feed their families, that there should not be any corruption or extortion, especially in the temple. If they were follolwing God’s ways, the community would be bearing fruit.

The wider message here is that it is our responsibility to care for what God has entrusted to us – one another and all of creation. Carrying out this responsibility should bear fruits of the kingdom – justice and equity, love and compassion. As we work toward this goal and calling, there is much in our lives and in creation we can be thankful for. Caring for all that God has entrusted to us, and being responsible also includes living with gratitude for what we have. As we celebrate thanksgiving this weekend, it is good to pause and consider all that we are thankful for, and sit with this gratitude for a moment.

 We are thankful for a loving and compassionate community of faith.

 We are thankful for families, birth and chosen, who love and support us.

We are thankful for friends who are there when we need them, whether for support or fun.

We are thankful for food and shelter, and those who care for those without.

We are thankful for faith and hope, and for those close to us who have it when we don’t.

We are thankful for opportunities to gather and learn and grow together.

We are thankful for generous hearts and donations that meet needs within our community and beyond.

We are thankful for the beauty of God’s creation and all the ways we can enjoy it.

We are thankful for life in all its fullness and the blessings we experience each day.

The tenants in the story seemed to have missed this kind of gratitude. They were so desperate for what they wanted, the harvest, that they took action that did not make sense. How would killing the son of the landowner, get them his inheritance? Especially when the landowner is still alive. Sometimes we get so focused on something we want, or think we want or need, that we behave in ways that seem counterproductive or do things that appear illogical to many. Can you think of examples of this in your life? In our society? Here are some of my musings about this:

* Could the government buying a pipeline and continuing to consume fossil fuels at the same rate, knowing the disasters the greenhouse gas emissions are causing be seen as counterproductive?
* How about using the [notwithstanding clause](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/judge-grants-injunction-school-pronoun-policy-1.6981406) of the Charter of Rights to limit the human rights of others?
* Maybe the [banning books](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/06/us/florida-banned-books/index.html#:~:text=This%20summer%2C%20a%20Florida%20law,few%20ways%20to%20fight%20back.) and drag queens from reading books to children to avoid the so called sexualization of children.
* Closer to home, what about [tearing down tents](https://regina.ctvnews.ca/regina-police-clear-city-hall-encampment-11-arrests-made-1.6498497) where the unhoused were sleeping, and not providing any other options to address the lack of shelter.

The Canadian Government is now looking to [sell the Trans Mountain](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trans-mountain-expansion-indigenous-1.6931557) pipeline to Indigenous communities – some of whom would buy because they need the economic opportunity even though many other Indigenous communities are against it and it goes against their values of caring for the land. Here, I would say that the Government is taking advantage of the vulnerability of indigenous communities who need economic opportunities, instead of addressing the roots of their poverty and finding solutions more in line with their culture and traditions. We have much work to do to bear the fruit of the kingdom in our lives and leadership.

God calls us to love and compassion which will bear fruit of the shalom community, where all have enough, where justice and righteousness is a priority; where people are housed and cared for and get the health care they need. May we be up to the challenge of carrying out this call and calling out the places, people, and organizations which are falling short of God’s will. May we live with gratitude for all we have and may that gratitude motivate us to care for one another and all of God’s creation.