

# Parish of the Divine Love

**Sunday October 4, 2020**

*Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Psalm 80:7-14; Philippians 3: 4b-14; Matthew 21: 33-46*

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!**

The parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21:33-46 represents our broken relationship with God, God's attempts to repair it, and mankind's rejection of these attempts. In spite of our continual rejection, God never gives up on us. God's love for us never diminishes. Greed is what the parable of the wicked tenants is all about, and greed is everywhere. That's why the parable is so timely and relevant today; because as that wise homebuilder knew the heart of his superintendent, so Jesus knows the condition of our hearts, and he wants us to change our ways. This parable speaks of anger and hatred against not only God, but against those who oppose him. This can be anyone-nonbelievers, criminals, terrorists, or persecutors.

"The kingdom of God will be taken away from you," Jesus says to the chief priests and the elders of the people. This is not so much a punishment for failing to produce kingdom fruits. It is, rather, the recognition of what already is. They were given the vineyard and failed to produce and share the fruits of the kingdom. Jesus is just naming the reality, the truth. They have excluded themselves. In the same way, the kingdom of God will be given to those who are already producing kingdom fruits. This is not a reward but a recognition of what already is. Where the fruit is, there also is the kingdom.

If you want to know what the fruits of the kingdom look like, then look at the life of God revealed in Jesus Christ. What do you see? Love, intimacy, mercy and forgiveness, justice, generosity, compassion, presence, wisdom, truth, healing, reconciliation, self-surrender, joy, thanksgiving, peace, obedience, humility. I'm not talking about these things as abstract ideas but as lived realities in the vineyards of our lives.

Exodus 20:1-20 and Matthew 21:33-46 are similar stories. In both cases God has told the people what he wants them to do and how he wants them to live their lives, and in both cases the people rejected him. God has done everything possible to give Israel every advantage. He has

established an everlasting covenant with them. He has led them through good times and bad. He has given them the Promised Land as their inheritance.

The same situation exists today. God has sent ministers, priests, preachers and godly evangelists to us to urge us to change our ways and accept Christ, but we and our worldly society continue to turn away. As men treat God's people, they would treat Christ himself the same way, if he was with them. If we are faithful to Christ's cause, how can we expect a favorable reception from a wicked world? Eventually, God will deal with those who reject God just like God dealt with the leaders of the Jewish people. The kingdom will be open only to those who believe God and are willing to do as he asks. Opposition to Jesus is a wrong response as is an attitude of apathy. Those who harbor such attitudes are in danger of being judged. The attitude of the tenants is represented by the Pharisees. They were so concerned about obeying the Ten Commandments that they came up with many rules and regulations governing what the people could and could not do. In time, the Pharisees developed an attitude of being entitled to God's kingdom even though they disregarded the spirit of God's law and emphasized the letter of God's law. They considered themselves to be the only people who were good enough for God's kingdom.

We have a similar attitude today. Our world is not a playground that God will let us live in. God's commandments are a reminder that God has expectations for God's chosen people. A people who have been chosen not for privilege but for service and witness. When we try to be in charge, it speaks of privilege, our misuse of freedom, or our arrogance. We fall into the trap of thinking we have a right to the many blessings that are part of the world we live in just like the Israelites thought that they had a right to the blessings God gave them.

God wants tenants who will produce. Do we want to be God's tenants? If so, what will we produce? If we produce, we will receive the kingdom of heaven. It can't be taken by us. It can only be given to us, but we have to earn it first and then share it with others. The only rent God will charge us is our time, our abilities and a portion of our money. We are called to be stewards of our lives, to give of ourselves in the name of the Lord as ministers of Jesus Christ. We are to share ourselves, our time and our possessions as a sign of God's love. Wherever we spend vast amounts of our time and energy working at a job, caring for a family, helping those in need, making sure that the less fortunate get a fair deal, etc., these are places for us to be

conscious of the fact that we are doing work in God's vineyard, and we will be held responsible for it at the proper time. The task isn't ours alone to complete. God has invested care and concern for the work we do in his vineyard, and in the end, God's ways are what we are trying to accomplish. We must remember that we are only tenants, and the full responsibility for the success of our work is not only ours. Giving grows out of loving and loving comes from God. We know love because God first loved us. We have known love and so we love others in return. Giving is our response to God's love, and our giving makes things happen. Next month we will celebrate the American Thanksgiving, a time to give thanks to God for all he has given us, including the opportunity to bear good fruit for him. We are to be thankful for the portion of worldly things that God has given us, be contented with what we have, and trust God to provide for the future.

Leadership must be about service and about nurturing God's people. Actions have consequences. Good actions reap good consequences like appreciation, respect, etc. Bad actions reap bad consequences like disrespect, prison, other forms of punishment, or even death. The parable is a statement of God's concern for his people and a declaration that God's plan cannot be defeated by man. If we love God, we realize that he knows the best way for us to live. He knows how to keep us from following the ways of the world. He sent his son Jesus to pay for our sins so we could be free from sin and walk in a way worthy of him. Which consequences do we want to reap at the end of our lives?

May God bless our ministry to produce fruit in our own lives and in the lives of others. God has faith in us. God is still hopeful. God still holds out a hand to us, God still gives us another chance, God still offers us grace upon grace.

**Amen.**