**Luke 20:9-19 (EHV)** – *(I am not going to read text again)*

It’s Tuesday of Holy Week. At the beginning of Luke chapter 20, we read that Jesus enemies were already looking for a way to put Jesus to death. In the meantime, they are eager to use every opportunity to try to undermine his authority, and find any kind of trap they could use against him.

That’s what happens at the beginning of the chapter. They come up to Jesus and ask him, “By whose authority do you teach these things?” Jesus flips the conversation on them, and exposes them as rejecting God’s prophets. They had rejected John the Baptist, who was God’s messenger to prepare the way for the Savior. And of course, if you’re rejecting the messenger, you’re really rejecting the person who sent the message. So Jesus exposes the Pharisees as rejecting God, because they’re rejected his prophets and his message, and then he tells this parable.

The parable is *about* the teachers of the law, but it’s *for* the people. Jesus is trying to help the people understand what’s about to happen to him and what the religious leadership is really doing – rejecting the son who was sent. With this parable, Jesus is offering the Pharisees, the listeners in the synagogue, and you and me who are listening today an opportunity to reflect on the thought – “what kind of tenant do you want to be?”

Let’s look at the first part of the parable. **“A man planted a vineyard, leased it to some tenant farmers, and went away on a journey for a long time. 10When it was the right time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect his share of the fruit of the vineyard.**

As Jesus is telling the story, his listeners can already see the connections Jesus starting to make. God’s people were very familiar with the concept of a vineyard. Both in day-to-day life as they owned them and worked in them, but also in Scripture too. The vineyard was one of the pictures that God used in the Old Testament to describe his people. In Isaiah 5, God calls Israel his vineyard. So if Israel is the vineyard – the people that are supposed to be producing fruits of faith – then the tenants, the people overseeing the vineyard, would be Israel’s religious leaders. They were in charge of caring for the needs of God’s people and helping them produce fruits of faith. But as Jesus continues, the parable takes an unexpected turn. Because these tenants were not carrying out the role they have been given.

**But the tenant farmers beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. 11The man went ahead and sent yet another servant, but they also beat him, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12He then sent yet a third. They also wounded him and threw him out.**

The owner who had given these tenants the privilege of overseeing his vineyard sent one of his servants to them. We would expect these tenants to treat this servant with respect, because he’s speaking on behalf of the Master. But they don’t. The servant is savagely beaten and thrown out. The Greek actually has the picture of flaying someone. The tenants aren’t reacting in a way that makes sense.

But the owner doesn’t either, does he? At this point in the parable, how would we *expect* the owner to react? Go down there himself right away! Maybe bring some soldiers with him. Kick all of those wicked tenants out; Imprison them, execute them, have nothing more to do with them. Something along those lines.

But he doesn’t. He sends a second servant and a third. Now we’re starting to wonder if there is something wrong with the landowner. Did he not get the message when his servants came back bloody and bruised? Did he expect something different with the second and third servant? Why is he being so patient and forgiving with these tenants? Why does he keep sending his servants to them? It’s not what we would expect at all.

But amazingly it is exactly how we see God deal with humanity, isn’t it? We’re looking at Israel’s history. If the vineyard is Israel and the tenants are the leadership that should be taking care of them, then the servants are *God’s servants* – the prophets. When we see the surprising and almost unrealistic actions of the landowner, we’re seeing the incredible patience and love of God. God patiently sending his servants – people like Elijah and Jeremiah, and John the Baptist – to people who would reject them, beat them kill them.

God, in patient love, continuing to reach out to people who reject him. Who choose to reject his message for something they want to hear instead. And of course, God doesn’t only deal with his Old Testament people this way, he deals with us this way too.

What’s ironic is that our gut reaction to this part of the parable is really a gut reaction to how God treats *us*. It’s easy to be mad at the tenants in the parable when we hear what they have done, but what we need to recognize is that the evil they have done, is also the evil *we* have done.

Consider how patient God is with us. We were dead in our sins, and God made us alive in Christ – he put faith in our hearts. But we still go back to sin *every single day.*

Every sin is like a slap in the face to God’s grace. God saved me; he gave me a new life. But right now, in this situation, whatever it is, I’m going to choose to live like he didn’t. God wants the best for me because he loves me. He wants me closer to him. When we sin, we’re choosing something that hurts our relationship, that takes us farther away.

We might not have killed God’s servants, but whenever we sin, we are treating their message, which is really God’s message, the same way as these tenants. When we put ourselves and our wants over God in our hearts, we’re breaking the first commandment. We’re making ourselves our idol.

Who would choose to willingly endure that kind of relationship? Who would have that kind of patience and mercy? Why would God do this – it’s not at all what we would expect!

But our God is a God who does the unexpected – shows perfect, patient love and forgiveness to sinful people like you and me; to people who reject him, hoping they will repent. And if that’s unexpected, the final part of the parable is by far the most surprising. The Father decides to send his own son. **The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.’**

We hear that and we think this is the most ridiculous, illogical, foolish choice we can think of. We hear that and it puts us on the edge of our seats – “No! don’t do that! What are you doing, haven’t you learned anything?!” And sure enough, his son is treated the worst of all. **14“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they talked it over with one another. They said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.’ 15They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.**

It seems like the vineyard owner isn’t the only one suffering delusions in this parable. For some reason, the tenants think they can get the owners inheritance by rejecting and killing his son. “Yeah, that sounds like a good idea – that’ll work! That’s the way to get what we want!” In the history of stupid ideas, that has to be pretty high up there – kill the boss’s son to get the boss’s blessing. And yet, that is exactly what these chief priest and teachers of the law were planning to do, wasn’t it? And that’s what Jesus was showing with this parable.

The Jewish leaders were doing the same thing Paul had warned against in Philippians 3. They had rejected the cornerstone of God’s plan of salvation, thrown that away – and were clinging on to worthless garbage instead. Their history as caretakers of the vineyard. Their own works righteousness – keeping God’s commandments outwardly but not in their hearts. Looking to themselves as the reason they should be right with God, instead of to the Son who *makes* us right with God. They thought they could reject the Son, kill him, and still get the inheritance from the Father.

In this parable, Jesus was giving the Pharisees a very clear warning: God the Father sent his servants the prophets to you with his message to repent. You rejected them. You’re trusting in yourselves instead of God. Now the Father has sent his own Son to you and you are rejecting him too. The tenants of the vineyard, have rejected God’s son, the promised Messiah. And in doing so, they have also rejected the Father who sent him. “Pharisees, the Father is not going to reward you for this! Reject the son and there are dire consequences. The Father will take that vineyard, that inheritance that you think you’re going to get, and give it to others instead.”

The Pharisees understood the message, and they hated Jesus all the more for it. **That very hour the chief priests and the experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them.** The Pharisees understood what Jesus was saying.

And they weren’t the only ones. Remember this parable was about the Pharisees but Jesus told it for the people. The people understood the message too, and they were appalled! The tenants of the vineyard, the spiritual leaders of Israel – rejecting God’s messiah? God taking his inheritance of salvation and giving it to someone else? Say it isn’t so! “May it never be!” **Μὴ γένοιτο!** This is the strongest way in Greek, to say you never, ever, ever want something to happen! ...But that’s exactly what was *already* happening – and that’s what Jesus was trying to show them. This would help the people understand what was about to happen in the next few days.

The Pharisees – the chief priests and experts in the law – had responded poorly to the Son they had been sent. They didn’t like his message, they rejected him, and in so doing rejected the one who sent him. They were already planning to kill him. In a few days, this part of the parable would become reality. The wicked tenants would kill the son, putting him to death on the cross.

But of course, that wasn’t the end of the story, was it? “**The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”** Three days after God’s son would be killed, God would raise him back to life. And he would show the world with an empty tomb and a risen Savior, that his son always *was* and always *continues to be* what God had always planned for him to be. The cornerstone of our salvation, the foundation of our faith, the most precious thing that we have.

God in his infinite patience and love gave us sinful people, what we absolutely didn’t deserve, but so desperately needed: God sent his own son to us. Knowing he would be rejected. Knowing he would die. Because that’s how much he loves us. He loves us so much that he humbled himself to be born into our broken sinful world. As a true human being to live a perfect sin free life on behalf of all humanity. To be the perfect son we fail to be, or to be the perfect tenant of the blessings God has placed in our lives. Jesus lived for us!

And he died for us too. He decided to credit us with his perfect life, and in our place be seen as the wicked tenant. The unloving spouse, the school bully, the unfaithful partner. God was pleased to crush his own son, to place the sin of the world on him, and have him suffer the full price of hell for it in our place. Jesus did that for us, and God declares us forgiven.

Your sins are forgiven in Christ! And the inheritance that the wicked tenants wanted but could never earn and never steal – in faith, Jesus gives to you. And he not only does that – he writes you into the will! You’re part of his family. A true heir of heaven and the Father’s estate because Jesus won it for you.

In this parable, Jesus shows the Pharisees, the people in the synagogue, and us listening to him today, that when it comes to Christ, the cornerstone of God’s plan of salvation, there are only two options: build your trust on him, or get crushed by him. Receive the forgiveness his death on the cross won for you, or reject it and also reject the inheritance he won for you. Jesus gives us the opportunity to reflect on the question, “What kind of tenant do I want to be?”

Now, at the end of the sermon, maybe we can reflect on something else too. “What tenant has God *made* me to be?” We are covered with the righteousness of Jesus. In faith, his righteousness, and the forgiveness he won for us, really is ours! Out of thanks we are delighted to live like the forgiven children he has made us to be. Amen!