

Lent 5            4/7/19  
Luke 20:9-20    C

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY,  
FROM THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

Oh, those naughty children! That's your reaction when you hear the words of Jesus this morning.

The owner plants a vineyard and leases it to tenants before he goes into another country. It's a standard arrangement: they do the work, and he gets a percentage of the harvest as rent. So when harvest time comes, he sends a servant to collect his share. But, instead of paying up, the tenants beat the servant and send him away empty-handed. This is, well, unwise, as landowners normally have quite a bit of power and are not known to take such abuse lightly. After all, the tenants haven't just beaten up a servant: they've beaten up a servant sent on the master's authority: to disrespect to the servant is disrespect to him.

The owner of the vineyard does something we might even call "crazy" -- he sends a second servant, apparently alone, just like the first. This one gets a beat-down and more: the tenants treat him shamefully and send him away empty-handed. They choose again to taunt and shame the owner of the vineyard in which they live.

And what does the owner do? He sends another servant. No back-up; just another servant. And what do the tenants do? They wound this one and throw him out too.

Well, we'd probably say it's time for the goon squad to come. Slap those tenants around a little; let'em know who's boss. Send a servant, but send a few hired guns along.

But what does the owner do? He says, “I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him (v. 13).” Boggles the mind, doesn’t it? The tenants have mistreated servant after servant, and now the owner is going to send his beloved son. Shouldn’t he know better by now? But perhaps, PERHAPS, the tenants will respect his son.

They will not, and here’s their “brilliant” plan: “This is the heir,” they say. “Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours (v. 14).” That’s their reasoning: if they kill the son, then the father will give them the vineyard. How blind can these tenants be? But that’s their plan, and they stick to it: they throw the son out of the vineyard and kill him, thinking the vineyard is now theirs.

Jesus is telling this parable to describe exactly what is happening to Him. The “vineyard” is the nation of Israel itself. As the landowner of the parable built the vineyard, so God formed the nation of Israel. He called Abraham out of all the nations on earth; He led them out of the bondage of Egypt, and into the Promised Land. He gave them His Law to warn them against turning to false gods.

Old Testament Israel had it made in the vineyard. But what did they do? They rebelled against God. They turned to false gods and idols. They embraced all sorts of pagan worship and immorality. Did the Lord condemn them right away? No. He sent prophets to warn them of their sin. What did the people do? They ignored Him, rejected the message and persecuted the prophets. In doing so, they were not just wounding or killing a man—they were acting in defiance of God who had sent the man to speak His Word.

And how did the Lord God respond? He sent more prophets, prophets who kept on warning of judgment and calling to repentance. They

didn't come armed with anything but the Word of God, and the tenants responded to God's patient mercy by killing His messengers and rebelling all the more.

You know the names of some of these prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel and many more besides. The Lord made sure that His Word was proclaimed, but the people would not listen. Eventually, because they wanted nothing to do with God, God gave them their wish. The ten tribes were easy pickings for the Assyrians, and the southern tribes fell to the Babylonians some years later. Jerusalem was leveled, its citizens taken into exile. Oh, and what did the Lord do? He kept sending prophets, even to the exiles, calling them to repentance so that they might be forgiven. He brought them back to Jerusalem, making sure His Word was proclaimed to them.

Which brings us to our Gospel lesson. At the time Jesus tells the parable, the religion of Judea is not one of trusting in God and His gracious promises. It is the religion of the Pharisees, who teach that you're saved by the good works you do. God had sent one last prophet, John the Baptist; and John has been beheaded for speaking God's Word. So now, finally, what has God done? He has sent His own beloved Son into the vineyard to speak to the tenants. Perhaps, PERHAPS, they will respect His Son.

But they haven't so far, and they're not going to.

Oh, those naughty children! I'm so glad I'm not like that! That's your reaction to the parable this morning. But, Dear Saints of God, Jesus is not asking you to look at the children of Israel this morning; He's asking you to take a look at yourself. Lent is a time of renewal and repentance and

Jesus is calling you to repentance. The parable this morning is about how sinners treat God and how God treats sinners.

Sinners disobey God and treat Him with disrespect. God gives us daily bread and we fail to be thankful. God gives us things to use in service to our neighbor, and we hoard for ourselves; even using our worldly wealth to boast of our accomplishments. God gives us bodies and minds to be used for honorable purposes, and we misuse and pollute them for temporary pleasure in self-destructive ways. God gives spouses, and sinners covet those that they're not married to. God gives family and friends and neighbors to serve, and we neglect them or take advantage of them for our own selfish gain. The Lord warns of sin so that sinners repent and don't die, and we poor sinners get ticked off that the Lord would try to save us from death. The Lord says, "Here I am" in His Word and Sacraments, and we thumb our nose at His means of grace and say, "There's really other stuff that I consider more important."

That's how sinners treat God.

But the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is how God treats sinners: "For God so loved the world that He send His only-begotten Son (Jn 3:16)." Jesus came, born of human mother, and took upon Himself all the times you ignored His Word, doubted it, refused to learn it, all the times you disobeyed and disrespected God, all your sin, and He carried it to the cross, where He died as the punishment for all of it. Because of His death on that cross and His resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, you are forgiven all of your sins.

God treats sinners with patience, mercy and grace. 2 Peter 3:9 declares, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but

that all should reach repentance.” As you steward what God has entrusted to you, He patiently showers you with forgiveness in His Word and Sacraments to keep you in the true faith, even as He patiently gives this dying world more time so that more might hear and be saved.

And yes, He continues to send His Word and preachers to proclaim it. One of the Lord’s many prophets, Joel, declared, “Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13). His grace, His mercy, His patience and steadfast love all yours for the sake of Jesus; because, for the sake of Jesus, you are forgiven all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen