

**ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)
SUNDAY 4 OCTOBER 2020
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (YEAR A)**

**READINGS: ISAIAH 5:1-7 //PSALM 80:7-15 //PHILLIPIANS 3:4B-14//
MATTHEW 21:33-46**

.....
God of wisdom and love, source of all good things, teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of peace and love. Lord open our ears that we may hear you Open our eyes that we may see you and open our hearts that we may accept you. AMEN

This is the third week we have a parable about a vineyard. Each one of these parables has been aimed against the Jewish Priests, Elders, Scribes and Pharisees who rejected Jesus. Like the hired workers in the vineyard, they were envious of his divine generosity. Like the disobedient son of his Father, they professed themselves ready to do God's will, but in fact they didn't. And like the vineyard tenants, having rejected and murdered God's servants the prophets, they were now planning to kill his only Son.

The parable of vineyard is a situation that was familiar in Roman-occupied Palestine. It is the same vineyard we read in our OT reading Isaiah 5.

The landowner planted a vineyard. He puts a wall around it: this was to protect his vineyard from wild animals that would steal its fruit and damage it. He builds a watchtower – to guard against thieves and fire Winepress – so that the grapes can be squeezed there on site.

He then leases it out to tenants, who were to tend to it. It will take time before this new vineyard will actually bear fruit, but he has entrusted its continued care to these tenants. It is theirs to enjoy, nurture, work and fulfil the purpose for which the landowner called them.

If they do their part, in due time, this vineyard will bring forth the fruit that it was made to produce.

But then in v34-36 we read "*When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.*

Landowners could expect tenants to turn over (a portion of) the crop. Those who failed to meet the landowner's standards would be removed from the land and the landowner could pay others to remove them forcefully if necessary.

However in this parable when the owner's servants arrived to collect his share of the produce, the tenants attacked them, even beating one and killing another. The owner of the vineyard then simply sent another delegation of servants to collect the fruit. They were treated worse than the first

Surely by now the owner would send in troops or some form of enforcement to deal with the tenants! But no, instead **he sends his son**, thinking that they will respect the owner's son and heir.

So what do we learn (what is the meaning) of this parable for us today

The surface meaning of the parable is not that difficult. What is represented is quite clear: ***The Landowner is God. The vineyard is Israel. The tenants are the religious leaders of Israel. The servants are the prophets, and the Son is Jesus the Messiah.***

But there is a deeper meaning

Firstly: This parable highlights God's longsuffering patience (to redeem the wicked tenants and us).

Prophet after prophet was sent to Israel to call them to repentance and bring the people back into a proper relationship with the Lord, however prophet after prophet (Jeremiah//) was mistreated and rejected.

So, God, this landowner put it all on the line. He sent his son (Jesus) to collect *the fruit*, hoping that the tenants would respect his son. But they didn't respect the son. When they saw the son, they said, "This is our chance. This is the heir to the vineyard. If we kill him, we can have the vineyard." And so, they forced the son out of the vineyard and killed him.

This might not seem to make much sense, but God is like that. God loves us even when we least deserve it. God wants us to love him so that he can bless us. God keeps trying to win us even when we have proven that we are losers. God is unwilling to give up on you or me. He just keeps on coming. That is the good news, hope, and joy in today's parable. God's unconditional love and patience with us, that he even sends his only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (John 3v16).

Secondly: This parable highlights that God's patience will eventually wear out

After telling them the parable Jesus asked them ***“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”*** They answered ***“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop (fruit) at harvest time.”***

Then Jesus quoted a verse from Psalm 118

“Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit

He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed

Jesus was warning them (the Pharisees, Chief Priest and the Elders) and us that God's patience has limits! Those who persist in rejecting God will find themselves crushed by the stone with which God had intended to help them. Jesus was warning them and us to be careful about stretching our rebellion too far. Jesus was telling them and us that our relationship to God is a matter of life and death. God is loving, patient, kind and forgiving. But there will come a time when his patience will come to an end. When that happens, the stone that he sent to be the cornerstone of our lives will crush us. (I know we don't always want to hear this but there will be judgement – therefore we need to change our lives. How?)

This brings us to my third point: God wants us to produce good fruit

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit

The emphasis on “fruit” in these verses reflects the importance of this word throughout this Gospel (see also 3:8; 3:10; 7:17-18; 12:33; 13:23 and 21:19). For Matthew, *fruit* indicates the produce of one's life. The Jewish leadership, failed to produce good fruit, they thought by quoting the Law, follow the rules, repeated the sacred prayers, that they produce good fruit but God is looking for more than that.

What then is the good fruit that God was looking for?

In Isaiah 5v 7 we read “That the Lord Almighty was looking for ***righteousness***” This means to produce good fruit we must have a right personal relationship with God. We must be faithful to God, God must be our cornerstone.

In the Philippians reading Paul focus is no longer upon himself anymore, he is driven by his need and passion to follow Christ. He says *'For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him'*

The things that had driven Paul in the past, his position as a Pharisee, schooled in Jewish law, and one who persecuted those who followed Christ, none of that was any longer important or relevant to him. **Only his relationship with God**

But in the context of Isaiah. 5 it is not only a personal relationship with God that is important but it also includes righteousness in our relationships with others—that we treat our neighbour *justly*. That we love our neighbour as ourselves.

The Fruit God is looking for is righteousness both with God and with our neighbour It is having a personal relationship with God and bearing forth his image to our neighbour, by exercising the fruit of the spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 3:16).

CONCLUSION

My dear friends who is the cornerstone of your life, what kind of fruit do you produce?