

ORDER OF SERVICE
Sunday, October 4, 2020 ~ 18th Sunday after Pentecost
St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Lebanon, OR 97355
Bishop +John S. Thornton, Presiding

A Greeting

SH'MA YSRA'EL: Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Leviticus 19:18)

Collect for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost: Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

A Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures: Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.
And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?
And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns;
I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

- ✦ Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's People.
- ✦ **Thanks be to God**

1st Song of Isaiah, Isaiah 12: 2-6

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Surely, it is God who saves me; *
I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, *

and he will be my Savior.
Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing *
from the springs of salvation.
And on that day you shall say, *
Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name;
Make his deeds known among the peoples; *
see that they remember that his Name is exalted.
Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things, *
and this is known in all the world.
Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy, *
for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 21:33-46

Jesus said, "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'" So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:
"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

This is the Gospel of the Lord,
✠ **Praise to you, Lord Christ**

Homily: “The Way to Peace is Peace” said Martin Luther King, Jr.” – Bishop + John S. Thornton

There come moments in our lives when we realize who we are – and, therefore, who we are not. For me, one of those moments came in the summer of 1947.

I was fourteen at the time, in high school, the Elgin High School, in Elgin, Illinois. (In case you're not up on Illinois geography, Elgin is west of Chicago. There were about forty miles of corn and soybeans between Elgin and The Windy City, but we breathed its air. Doctors, later, would diagnose “Chicago lungs.” One told me that I had them. But I'm digressing.)

In the summertime, my buddies, Bob Wiegel and Jack Hallman and Chuck Levault and Fred Waltz and I, when we weren't doing odd jobs, would go the South Elgin Quarry to swim. It was an old limestone quarry that was fed by springs. The water was clear – and cold! We didn't spend much time in the water. It was a popular hang-out for teenagers, much more popular than the Wing Park pool, which, normally, was full of little kids, splashing and yelling. At the Quarry, we'd lie on our towels in the sun, to get tanned, but only got burned. We'd look at girls, look and look and look at girls. We'd pretend we were Errol Flynn or some Hollywood ladies' man. We'd swan-dive and cannonball off the high board, hoping that everyone would notice our daring. I doubt that anybody did. We who thought we knew so much about the world didn't know that we were clueless about most of it.

On the front of the diving tower, in big letters, black on white, easily seen from beyond the fence, was a sign: “GENTILE CLIENTEL.” It didn't mean anything to me. I guessed, I suppose, that it was some kind of Latin phrase. I hadn't taken Latin. I wasn't going to take Latin. Only smart girls took Latin. But, one day, it occurred to me that I should know what the sign meant. “GENTILE CLIENTEL.” So I asked my mom. She looked straight at me and said, “John, it means “No Jews.” No Jews?! It wasn't Latin at all. It was plain Protestant Christian Elgin, Illinois Anti-Semitic English. That's not fair, I thought. “What could Jews possibly do to the water” I asked. “It's not what Jews could do to the water,” my mom said, “it's what the owner thinks Jews could do to his clientele.” I never went to the South Elgin Quarry again. I knew who I was – and that I'd never do or say anything anti-Semitic. I told my buddies.

It was 1947. The war in Europe was over. I guess we saw some footage of the liberation of the death camps in Germany and Poland in the British Pathe newsreels at the Rialto Theater downtown; but we were there for the Lone Ranger and Tom Mix and Gene Autry shoot-'em-up (my mom's description) movies. The Holocaust seemed so far away and so unimaginable. The extent and depth of evil just didn't sink in. I was so dense and so numbskulled that, even now, I'm embarrassed to confess it. I suppose I even thought that Jesus was a Christian. Nobody told me otherwise. But now, by God, I know he wasn't.

That brings me to today's Gospel reading. I read it critically. What training I have in biblical criticism makes me (a) more critical with the Bible and, at the same time, (b) more biblical. I'm glad for it.

Matthew 21:33-46.

The NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) calls it “The Parable of the Wicked Tenants.” And, sure enough, they are wicked. They’re just renting a vineyard, on shares. When time came to divvy up the produce (the grapes, I guess; maybe the wine), the landowner sent his people to collect his share. The tenants beat up some of them, stoned some of them, killed some of them. And when the landowner, in desperation, sent his own son to collect, they killed him too, believing that the landowner will just give up and let them have the place. You can't get much wickedder than that. So, yes, it is “The Parable of the Wicked Tenants.”

But why isn't it called “The Parable of the Wicked Landowner” too? Sure, he owned the land, he had the vineyard planted, he had the stone wall built around it, he had the wine press dug in it, he had the watchtower put up. It was all his, and he was entitled to his share of the produce. There shouldn't have been any question about that. But the tenants did question it, for reasons that turned to violence and, they thought, victory. The tenants got the landowner wrong. He wasn't going to give up and let them have the place. After they killed his son, he vowed to, as it says in the NRSV, “put those wretches to a miserable death.” (The Greek is more specific about it. The landowner hired *kakous* to deal with the tenants. A *kakos* is a *kakopoios*, a “miserable b....,” an “evil-doer,” a “criminal.”) So... the landowner hired hit men to murder the tenants. Doesn't that qualify as wickedness too?

Maybe this text should be called “The Parable of the Wicked Tenants and the Wicked Landowner and Wickedness All Around.” Once wickedness gets started, there's no stopping it. No one is quickly and easily understood, no one quickly and easily absolved. Jesus, we need you now, always now.

When I looked at the Gospel reading a few weeks ago, I thought, Oh, that's an easy one. The “landowner” is “God” and.... I started to do what many, maybe most, exegetes do. They turn a parable into an allegory. But the very minute you do that, identify the “landowner” with “God” or vice versa, you've become an idolater, in terms of Judaism and Christianity. That's not good. Remember, as I just told you, the landowner in the parable is corrupt and vengeful and punitive and merciless. (He hires hit men to murder the tenants.) You'd attribute that to God? Well, if you do, you do it contrary to the consistent witness of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Jewish experience down the centuries seems summed up in Joel (2:13):

“Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

God is gracious.

God is merciful.

God is slow to anger.

God is of great kindness.

God repenteth him of the evil.

You'll find those very words in numerous places in the Hebrew Scriptures. It's the heart of Judaism. It's the heart of Jesus, the Jew. It's the heart of Christianity, insofar as we Christians follow the Christ.

There's a traditional interpretation of this text that I want to warn you about. It turns a parable into an allegory.

I have a copy of *THE ONE VOLUME BIBLE COMMENTARY* in my library. It was copyrighted in 1908. There was a 28th printing in 1966. That's the one I have. It has a long history, way beyond 1966, way beyond 1908, way, way back to the 3rd Century. On Page 695 is the commentary on "The Wicked Husbandmen." It's ingenious. And, in my opinion, it's wrong.

I'll read the introduction for you:

"The doctrinal importance of this parable, which belongs to the oldest tradition, is great. In it Christ claims to be in a unique sense the Son of God. He calls Moses the prophets slaves and bond-servants, and he places Himself at an immense elevation above them as the beloved Son of the Householder and the sole heir of His possessions."

I don't believe a word of it. Jesus said no such thing. He said just the opposite. That interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures and history is the kind of triumphalism that ends up with supercessionism (i.e., that Christianity has superseded Judaism, has taken away all Judaism's legitimacy). And that will end up with anti-Semitism – and pogroms and holocausts and, most recently, the slaughter at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. If you ever run out of things to repent of, repent of the Church's warrant or allowance of anti-Semitism. And read James Carrol's *CONSTANTINE'S SWORD*, the whole documentation of it.

Now....

Here's how the text is interpreted in the old *ONE VOLUME BIBLE COMMENTARY*. The "householder" (the landowner in the NRSV) is God. The vineyard is the Jews, whom God has planted in the land of promise. The "hedge" (the stone wall) is the Law. The winepress is the altar of sacrifice. The watchtower is the Temple. The "husbandmen" (the tenants) are the Pharisees and scribes. The householder's (the landowner's) servants, who are beaten up and stoned and killed, are the prophets. On and on it goes. You get the idea. Finally, the "householder" (the landowner) won't take it any longer and, I quote the King James Version, vows to "miserably destroy those miserable men" (the Jews). Now the "householder," having been denied his due, having been flat-out swindled, is going to start all over again, with new tenants. The new tenants are, you guessed it, us, Christian Church. All I ask is that you never subscribe to it.

I think I can understand Matthew, the Gospel-writer. He was a Jew who had experienced Jesus of Nazareth, either directly or through those who had. Jesus had made God real. He had brought God out of the Holy of Holies. He had brought God down from the heavens. He had made God hungry and tired and footsore and dirty with the dirt of Galilee. He had made God laugh. He had made

God as human as he. And Matthew wanted the whole world to know that and was disappointed and perturbed and heartbroken and, maybe, angry that so many of his fellow Jews wouldn't follow. Somewhere, in the Jesus tradition, was the parable he could use to explain what had happened in their midst. And there were those lines in Isaiah. If he misused any of it, we've misused it more.

I think that the Jesus Seminar scholars have found that original parable. They've found it in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. Intuitively, I agree. It has the simplicity and directness of Jesus in it.

The parable is about an absentee landowner and the men who rent his vineyard. It turns out badly. It all ends with dead bodies, of human beings. When it's all over, the only one still standing is the landowner, not his servants, not his own son and, of course, not the tenants. Maybe Jesus actually saw something like that. Maybe he saw it all the time. Where does all this violence come from? What do we have to do to stop it? Tell me, he says. You know. I want to know what you know. Tell me. Where does this sense of imbalance, the sense of subservience, this discontent, this grievance, this...this violence come from? We have to stop it. 'C'mon, play God now. That's it, play God. That will save you.

And that's the purpose of the parable, to get people thinking about the origins of violence and searching their own hearts and figuring out how they're going to be justice-makers and peace-makers...and playing God. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The way to peace is peace." It we Christians, particularly we Episcopalian Christians, are to be the bearers of that peace, we have to stay focused on Jesus' way of living in the world and on the authenticity of his teaching and, of course, on the daring to make God real.

Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, all of us, side by side, hand in hand, are called to make this small peace this larger peace, until it has the largeness of Shalom...Shalom...Shalom.

Versicles from the Baptismal Covenant

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- Celebrant* Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?
People I will, with God's help.
- Celebrant* Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
People I will, with God's help.
- Celebrant* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
People I will, with God's help.
- Celebrant* Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
People I will, with God's help.

THE SACRAMENT, +John S. Thornton

Just think of it:
I kneel at the altar,
The bread placed upon my hand,
Chew and swallow it,
A part of me now,
This "Body of Christ."
No more thinking then;
Just the feeling of being breaded,
One with Christ,
One with you, my love,
One with this hungering race.
It's enough;
And I go away feeling fed
As at few other times.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer for St. Martin's

God of Love, open our eyes and ears to perceive you at work in creation, the church, and our parish. Fill our hearts with your love that we may reach out in love to others. Stir up our imagination with your Holy Spirit that we may find new ways to live into life with you. Give us a vision of your mission that we may share your love and your spirit in all the places where we work and play and worship you. In Jesus' holy name, **Amen.**

Blessing

Dismissal

Let us go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the spirit! **Thanks be to God!**