

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

There is something eerily familiar about our Old Testament and Gospel lessons this morning. We have a vineyard. We have a fence. We have a winepress. We have a watchtower.

Believe it or not, some of the best preaching might not be exactly new. If it was good 700 years ago, why not preach it again?

But the thing is, the sermon inspired by God and preached by Isaiah didn't seem to work last time. But could it work this time?

Will the old song bring a new ending when modified by Jesus?

Jesus draws His parable from a love song the Lord sang through Isaiah some 700 years earlier: ***“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning His vineyard”*** (Isaiah 5:1a). The vineyard Isaiah was singing about was Israel and Judah, God's chosen people. God loved His people as He gave them a rich land, protection from enemies, His continuous presence, and the promise of the coming Messiah.

But this love song would turn tragic. Despite His strenuous efforts, the vineyard would only produce wild grapes. The wild grapes of idolatry, injustice, and bloodshed. This vineyard produced nothing but evil. And even when God sent a line of prophets to warn them and to turn from their wicked ways, they failed to bear good fruit. So, what did God do to His vineyard of wild grapes? He removed its hedge. He broke down its wall. He destroyed it. He laid it to waste.

Unmistakably, Jesus' version in telling this old love song is intended to be about the Jewish leaders of His day. Jesus said, ***“There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them”*** (Matthew 21:34-36).

You see, these tenants did not see themselves as sharecroppers. They didn't see themselves as actually leasing the vineyard. They saw themselves as the vineyard owners. These tenants believed that they were in control of the vineyard. They did not fear, love, or respect their landlord.

So, instead of giving the owner His share of the crops, these wicked tenants just beat, killed, and stoned the owner's servants.

For some reason, this master was slow to anger, and He thought He would give these wicked tenants another opportunity to give Him His share of the crop thinking, ***"They will respect My Son"*** (Matthew 21:37). So, he sends His Son. And guess what? These tenants begin to scheme as they say to themselves, ***"This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance." And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him"*** (Matthew 21:38-39).

You see, according to Jewish Law, if the owner would die without an heir, there would be an extremely good chance that the tenants who leased the land would end up inheriting the land.

Now, these wicked tenants were still heirs of the Promise. These wicked tenants were still the nation through which the Messiah would come. These wicked tenants were still blessed with God's presence. And these wicked tenants were still warned by God's prophets. As heirs of the promise, God expected them to bear fruit in welcoming the Messiah and to present Him to all nations.

So, would these Jewish leaders heed Jesus' telling of this old song, or would they repeat the same tragic ending of Old Testament Israel? At that very moment, on Tuesday of Holy Week, the Last Messenger of the Master, the Son, was now among them, and at that very moment, these men were plotting to kill Him.

Instead of repenting of their sin and receiving forgiveness, they cherish their sin by plotting the murder of the Heir. For their hardness of heart, Jesus says that the Cornerstone will crush them and they would be broken to pieces. He will put those wicked tenants to a miserable death. It's going to be the same old tragic ending as the first time. But is it the same ending?

There is a slight twist here. Yes, there is destruction and bloodshed, but this time only the wicked tenants are destroyed. This time, the vineyard remains. Instead of total destruction, the owner just takes away the vineyard from the wicked tenants and gives away the vineyard to other tenants who will give Him the fruits in their seasons.

All the while, this owner of the vineyard was showing His sheer grace to the wicked tenants. First, He established the vineyard. Second, He wonderfully supplied the vineyard with gifts that would enable an abundant harvest. Although these wicked tenants rebelled against Him, in love He sent His only Son. And though these wicked tenants rejected and murdered the Master's own Son, God the Father raised Him up to make Him the Cornerstone.

Two thousand years later, Jesus' Parable of the Wicked Tenants is now the parable for us. By God's grace, God has given us His vineyard. And He continues to send His Son to us through the ministry of His Church.

Like, God's people of old, we have been placed in God's vineyard – *God's kingdom* – by His grace. In this kingdom, God lavishly supplies us with those things that nurture fruit: His Word and His Sacraments. Like then, as now, God keeps sending us His servants – *His pastors* – just as He sent the Old Testament prophets. Now, prayerfully, His servants of the Word who rightly preach His Word are treated fairly – *and not beaten, killed or stoned*. Above all, God the Father sent us His Son.

Today, we retell this Parable among us to move us to render the fruit of the vineyard and receive those whom He has sent us, especially His Heir, His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

The fruit of the vineyard is repentance, faith, and love toward God and our neighbor that flows from faith. All of this is what Christ came to nurture in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22).

But all too often, we also fall into the same tragic ending of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.

- We show ourselves to be unfaithful tenants of God's kingdom whenever we do not show love toward God and our neighbor as the fruit of faith.
- We show ourselves to be unfaithful tenants when we refuse to forgive our neighbor.

- We show ourselves to be unfaithful tenants when we choose to store our money rather than cheerfully giving to the Lord the first fruits of His share of the crop.
- We show ourselves to be unfaithful tenants when we do not receive God's only Son who comes to us through His Word and Sacraments.

Too often we fail to bear this fruit of love for God and our neighbor in the vocations into which He has placed us. Too often, we would rather be approved by the fallen world than speak of the grace we have received by faith through Jesus' atoning death and bodily resurrection. Such sin renders us undeserving of the vineyard and being put to eternal death.

But God the Father sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus, to redeem the vineyard and its tenants. Through His earthly life, Jesus was perfectly faithful in His vocation and mission to save the lost. Although He was thrown out of Jerusalem and murdered, God the Father raised Him from the dead and placed Him as the Cornerstone of His Church.

Through Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, He has redeemed the vineyard. He has taken the punishment that we deserve and has given us the vineyard, which is His kingdom! He turned what looked evil – *the crucifixion* – into good, the redemption of the vineyard for our salvation.

The death of God's Son on the cross was not just the evil plotting of men, it was God's plan. And since the salvation Jesus procured on the cross was for all people, even the people who plotted and carried out His execution are included. The inheritance of salvation is for everyone who clings to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Today, you are blessed! You are blessed once again knowing that God the Father's Son is coming to you through His Word and Sacraments. So, let us render the vineyard's fruit by giving God His share of the fruit and receiving His Son! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +