

PENTECOST 18

YEAR A

ISAIAH 5:1-7

PHILIPPIANS 3:4b-14

MATTHEW 21:33-46

OCTOBER 7, 8, 2017

My father had a relatively small piece of land during the years before his death. When he could no longer work the land he rented the land to a neighboring farmer who farmed it. The agreement was that the farmer would pay yearly rent for the use of the land. The land remained my father's land but he gave the right to farm to the farmer that rented the land. Every year the farmer tried to buy the farm land from my dad and every year my father refused. He was not interested in selling but did want to gain rent money.

**Matthew 21:33, 34** 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. <sup>34</sup>When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce.

In this parable the landowner planted a vineyard. The vineyard was built with the usual safeguards built in. He built a fence and a watchtower so that robbers or animals could be kept away from the crop. The owner also built a winepress so that wine could be made from the grapes. If we look at our First Reading from Isaiah 5 we see that this was a normal way of growing a crop of grapes. The owner of the vineyard wanted to have the best chance to obtain a crop. In this story from Matthew 21 the landowner rented out the land and the grapes vines to tenants who were to take care of the crop. They were to guard it and to nurture the crop until the time of the harvest. At the harvest they were to give a portion of the crop to the owner. That was the rent for living on the land. Their wage was from what was left after giving the landowner the appropriate amount. The vineyard remained the property of the land owner but the tenant farmers were permitted to tend and maintain the vineyard. They could even enjoy the benefits of the harvest but would need to pay a portion of the proceeds to the owner of the vineyard.

The church and our relationship with the Lord is very much like that of the Jews and God. In the Isaiah 5 reading we see that the vineyard is the house of Israel. The vineyard is planted by God. The vineyard is to yield a good crop. You and I are the people of God. We might even be referred to as the house of Israel or the house of God. The Lord planted us in this place and our task is to bear good fruit. Good fruit means we use the gifts of the spirit so that God's people are cared for. We use the gifts of the spirit so that the church of Jesus Christ grows and God's people are cared for.

Our Stewardship committee will begin the fall stewardship drive in the next couple of weeks. They will tell us about the church and what we are doing and what we are being led to do. They may even say words like tithe and offering. The committee will also talk about time and talent. When we hear those words we often think of giving what is ours to give. We might think in terms of what we have amassed. Stewardship is more than just giving money. It also means protecting and caring for what God has given us. When God entrusts us with a building for our ministry we care for that building. We do the routine maintenance and make improvements as may be necessary. From the church building we tell of Jesus and his love. Stewardship also means we give of ourselves so that God's people are cared for. It also means we give a portion of our income back to the Lord.

In this parable from our Lord, the tenants did not own the vineyard they were caring for. The farmer that rented land from my father did not own the field he was farming. Each got to use the land and gain a profit from the land but the land was not theirs. They did not own it. In the same way, all that we have belongs to God. Our church building belongs to God and we get to use it to share the ministry of Word and Sacrament. When the Lord comes or sends someone to receive the rent, we must pay up. We give the Lord what God has coming from our labors. The same is true with the money and possessions we

have accumulated or earned. It all belongs to God and the Lord would have us bear fruit with what belongs to God. The Lord owns all we have but only asks us for 10%.

**Matthew 21:39, 40**      **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?"**

The priests and the Pharisees were entrusted with the responsibility of caring for God's people. Since they claimed to know the word of God they had the responsibility of understanding the word of God. They were in positions of leadership over the people and they were to love God's people and seek to nurture them with a right teaching and a loving character. As we see throughout the gospels, the Pharisees were anything but loving and caring. Their love was for their position instead of for God's people. They were entrusted with God's people but they failed to care for them but sought the condemnation of any that were not a scribe or a Pharisee.

As a pastor I have been entrusted with this congregation and to care for it. That includes doing the things that pastors are supposed to do. That would include preaching sermons and teaching Bible studies. It would also include caring for those that are hurting. It includes being honest with you at all times. There are many other responsibilities entrusted to me as the pastor of this congregation but are not as visible. I am to love you and pray for you. I am to lift you when you have fallen and be a little Christ to you. You belong to God but the Lord has entrusted you to me.

**Matthew 21:41**      **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."**

The priests and the Pharisees convicted themselves as they answered Jesus. They perceived that Jesus is talking about them. The Pharisees were the ones that were using up God's resources and not seeking to serve the Lord. They

were using the gift of knowledge without seeking the wisdom that goes along with it. They were in places of leadership placed there by God yet they continued to seek the destruction of God's people. They condemned themselves when they answered that those wretches need to be put to a miserable death. The answer the Pharisees give is not the message of the gospel. You and I seek vengeance. The Lord seeks to love. When we were deep in our sin and stood convicted God sent God's only Son. You and I deserve the fullness of God's wrath yet Jesus came to die on the cross for us. Paul says in Philippians 3 that he would gain the righteousness of Christ gained on the cross. It is a righteousness based on faith. Through Christ we have life. We have life because of the resurrection.

As this gospel reading concludes we see that the Pharisees are not interested in striving to know more. They are more intent on killing Jesus. They are not interested in faith or love they wanted vengeance because they perceived Jesus was speaking about them. You and I strive for a closer relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are to strive for a closer walk with the Lord. We press on toward the kingdom of God. We are the body of Christ entrusted with gifts of the spirit. Let us use those gifts that God's people are cared for. Use those gifts to lift God's word and to reach out to those in need of hearing the message of life from God's word. Since we are God's people we share the life of Christ. We share in God's love. God sent Jesus to be our Savior and our Lord. You are not condemned but you are forgiven. Walk in this new life given by God through Jesus Christ. AMEN