

Matthew 21:33-43
Pentecost 20
Pastor Kolander

If you have an herb garden, you are going to plant things that you eventually want to eat, I would think. If you hate Basil and the smell of it, you probably won't plant it. If you hate garlic why would you put that bulb in the ground? If you are going to put in the work and effort of growing something, especially in our plant growing zone, you probably want to enjoy the fruit of your labor, because it is going to take some work. It is going to take putting the right plant in the right soil and the right irrigation, and months and months of work to finally get a payoff. But if you have a little hobby garden well, it's worth it. You are going to put in the work because you want the payoff, some sweet freshly grown herbs or vegetables.

We have a parable in front of us today that we want to dive into. There is a man in this parable from Matthew 21 who wants a vineyard. So he plants one. This isn't a Saturday morning project, hobby vineyard. He holds nothing back and plants a serious vineyard. You know why he planted a vineyard? It's not because they look nice. It's because he wanted to enjoy the fruit that the vineyard was going to produce. He wanted to have great crops of grapes and produce wine. You know how I know that? He put a winepress on the property. This is the goal of the vineyard, produce exceptional fruit and eventually some great wine. And he cares about this property. He builds a wall around it because he doesn't want anyone or any animal coming in to steal his grapes. He creates a watchtower on it- more protection. This is something precious to him that he does not want to be taken from him. He cares about it, and he invests resources to take care of it.

Then he rented it out to some farmers to work his field. He planted the vineyard. He protected the vineyard. He built a winepress expecting great things out of the vineyard. He hired people that were capable of taking care of the vineyard. And after some time had passed, now it is time for the harvest! Now all of that work should have a sweet payoff for him. So, he sends his servants to go collect from the farmers to whom he rented the field. Our text says this is how the farmers treated those servants sent to collect: they beat one, and they killed one, and they pelted another one with rocks, presumably until he died, so not just death, but an agonizing death.

So he sent more servants. Those farmers treated the servants the same way. So the owner says, "They will respect my son." So the owner sent him.

Jesus is teaching this parable. This is during Holy week. The week that Jesus is going to be crucified. Just days before this Jesus is teaching in the temple. And listening to him aren't just people that want to learn from him because they think he is the Savior. But there are also a group of people hanging on every word just hoping he will slip up so they can take him down. Those people are the leadership of this church. And this is a message aimed right at them. Israel is the vineyard. God loved that nation. From the time when he called Abraham to be the father of the whole nation until this time a couple of thousand years later. God took care of this nation like that master took care of his vineyard. God had planted this nation exactly where he needed it to. God protected the people from danger. Not with a wall or a watchtower, but with his power that he used time and time again to rescue the people from danger. And God had entrusted this nation to people. Not to farmers, but to priests, and to kings, and to people who were supposed to be taking care of the people like a farmer takes care of a vineyard. But they didn't. They didn't listen to God's calls to them time and time again to turn back and follow his laws. They didn't welcome his prophets every time God sent one to them.

It wasn't the farmers land. It was the masters. It wasn't the priests' temple. It was God's. It was the leadership country; it was God's. But they were responsible for taking care of it. They were stewards of God's gifts. Managers of the gifts that God had given to them. They rejected God and all of his messengers, and now, the master had sent his son to them. God had said, "Surely they will respect my son."

In the parable, they killed the master's son hoping to keep the vineyard for themselves. Just a couple of days later these same leaders of the church would be scheming all night trying to find some way to kill Jesus without losing their political career. And they would succeed in killing the son of GOD.

The story had to hit right between the eyes. They let God down. Not because they were incompetent, not because they didn't have the gifts or skills, but because they were greedy, arrogant, and evil. They refused to give respect to the master, even though he gave them everything. God had given his church everything that they needed to not only survive but also thrive, and these leaders of the church had destroyed it. Instead of focusing

on the promises of God they focused hypocritically keeping is laws outwardly but inwardly hating the way of the Lord. Instead of getting ready for the Savior to come, they made themselves comfortable in this world. And Jesus wanted them to know that's not acceptable.

It's easy to point out the weaknesses of others, isn't it? What about us? What does our vineyard look like here? Can we stop for a minute and just appreciate the gifts that God has given to us. We aren't the nation of Israel, God's chosen nation. But we are a church who teaches the word of God. And we know God loves us, blesses us, and provides for us. We have 400 some communicant members. Meaning, 400 people who know what the Bible says and have publicly said, I want to live my life according to what the Bible teaches, and I want to be a part of this church, GVELC because I believe that they teach what the Bible says. That's special. So we have a well sized vineyard here.

And he has given us what we need, hasn't he? We don't have a big watchtower stationed with guards 24 hours a day, but we do have a Pastor that for almost three decades who 24/7 has been watching out for this church to make sure that they stayed well fed by God's word. That's blessing that not every church can claim. We don't have a big wall around our church, but we have been blessed by many mature Christian members who are solid in their faith and support their church every chance they can get. We are blessed by the resources that we have here. And we have all been blessed. Some financially more than others. Some with family more than others. Some with a relationship with friends more than others. Some with brilliance and wisdom more than others. Each one of us is gifted in different ways. We have different abilities, different strengths, various weaknesses, we are at various points in our life. And all if it is because God chose to give it to us. He decided to provide you with these gifts. And we have one common goal, keep growing, until the harvest. Get fed by God's word. Soak up the precious word. Get close to the son of God. Be firmly rooted in your community here and grow. This is our vineyard to watch over.

Falling into the trap of those wicked farmers is easy. Their big problem was that they thought it was their vineyard, not the masters. After all, they were the ones working in it. So why should they split the profits with the

master, or the servants, or the master's son when the harvest came? They thought it all about them and all about their comfort. They came first. The wants or needs of the master came second. All about what this vineyard could do for them, and not about what they could do to help out that vineyard. It slips in. It's my church; I want to talk with my friends rather than going to Bible class. What can this church do for me rather than how can this church help my faith grow? I want this church to grow, but man those kids are annoying that keep crying when I am trying to pay attention. What can this church do for me rather than how can I help the faith of my brothers and sisters grow? Or I show up to church when I can, but you know one hour a week is about all the time I have with all of the activities we have.

This is your vineyard to work in. To grow in. This isn't our church building. It's a house dedicated to God. When we give our offerings here we are not giving them to this church; we are giving them to God. When we serve on the alter guild, or evangelism committee, or usher, or greet or watch the little ones in the nursery we aren't just helping out our church, we are serving God. We aren't here to balance a budget, or to run 5013c nonprofit, or to be in a club that sings 16th-century German Carols once a week. We are here to grow in our faith and serve the Lord. We are here to develop our gifts so that we can use them in God's service. We are here to focus on Jesus. We are here to prepare for the harvest. We are here to prepare each of our hearts to meet our Savior when he returns. We are here to be reminded week in and week out that we need a Savior because we are sinners. We are here to be comforted by the fact that Jesus God's son came paid for each and every one of our sins.

I wonder what Jesus what parable Jesus would tell us if he were standing in front of us today. Would this lesson be different? Would he be able to say to you, well done good and faithful servant? Or would he reprimand us for being like those wicked farmers? That's something that each of us needs to answer honestly. Are we faithful to the Lord with what he has given to us?

When you look at this parable in front of us today, it is amazing how patient that master is. Isn't it? Put yourself in his shoes. If you owned a vineyard. If you planted that vineyard, if you built a wall around that vineyard, if you constructed a wine press on that vineyard, if you built a watchtower on that vineyard, if you hired farmers to work on that vineyard,

And then you sent some employees to go collect some of the harvests on that vineyard, and they were beaten and killed. Would you send more servant to try and reason with them? Would you send your children to try and convince them? When we look at the patience that God had with the Old Testament church, We see that same love. Time and time again that nation turned away from God. Time and time again they worship something else. Time and time again they squandered what God had given to them. And God never gave up on them. He kept calling them back. He kept asking them to change their ways. He kept asking them to turn it around. It is the same God. Who is patient with us. He didn't send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world. That's what John 3:17 says. He is always forgiving. Always patient. Always kind. He is always calling us to repent and see the love that he has for us.

So Let's keep working. Let's keep building our church up. Let's keep growing in our faith and being good managers of all of the gifts that God has given to us.

Amen