



St John Lutheran Church

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Luke 20: 9-19

"He shall come. . . and shall give the vineyard to others."

Today's parable about a field is one of many about vineyards and fields. **Such symbolism is** always synonymous with the Church. **There's no doubt** in any one's mind as to Who's Who and today's Gospel is no different. **In all of** them the message is the same. **Simply put, Jesus is** revealing the "**The Upsidedownness, the Insideoutness**" of the Christ of God-Crucified! **That's *always* been** His message so that the prophet ***must*** say: "**I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord...I cannot do what is either good or bad in my own mind; but I must do what the Lord saith... that is all I will speak**" So too, then, Jesus. "**The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He hath anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**"

Christ brings forth nothing of His own... **but rather** is the Faithful Word having come from God in the flesh. **Yet how do** men received that Faithful Word? **Though the Word "was fulfilled in their ears"** ...**they testify *against*** Him. **Although they knew** Messiah would be the "**Son of God**" ...**they say of Jesus, "Isn't this Joseph 's son?"** **They refuse the Gift,** and refusing the Gift they reject the Giver... **and rejecting the Giver they reject the One who sent Him.**

And from that very first day... **they wanted** to kill Jesus. **They dragged Him** outside and took Him to the cliff's edge to throw Him over. **That was the** beginning of Jesus' rejection as a grown man. **But remember that** even as an infant, Jesus was deemed a threat to the Jewish authorities. **And today's Gospel** sermon comes from one of His last...**as Jesus is preaching *this*** Gospel standing in the Temple courtyard in Jerusalem on Holy Tuesday.

As St. Matthew records it... **He's in** the middle of His final preaching as His trial and crucifixion only a few days off. **He wants to** bring those who are hearing Him to repentance and faith but He knows the time is growing short. **It looks like** He's beginning to pull out all the stops. **But look how** He does it. **He doesn't preach** anything new... **but rather** points them back. **He's saying, in effect, "Remember what God has said!"** or as we recall from Scripture "**Rather, blessed are they that hear the Word and keep it!**" **And He says** it this way:

"Listen to another parable. There was a man, a householder who planted a vineyard." **Remember what God** has said? **It's clear that** they'd not just forgotten the Word... **but had** rather rejected Him who is the Word in the flesh! **So the ending of Jesus' Ministry...beginning with a sermon on Isaiah** ends like this: "**I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me. Therefore. . . 'My servants will eat,**"
"He shall come. . . and shall give the vineyard to others."

but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty. . . the LORD will put you to death, but He will call His servants by another name."

For those who reject the Word of God... Jesus as God-in-the-flesh... Jesus, their Lord... their Rock... their Redeemer... those who reject the Gift... the Giver... and the One who sent Him... simply said, have hell to pay. There just *is* no soft way to say it.

If you shy away and resist... if you put away from you the Word of Christ... the teaching of Holy Scripture... no matter how it may offend you... If you say "enough of this"... Jesus stands to warn you [Matthew 21:43] ".the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." And if you refuse the Son... you'll eventually hear... "Your house is left to you desolate." "Indeed the kingdom has been taken from you!"

These words ought terrify everyone. If it happened to them... it can happen to me... it Can happen to us! No one is beyond temptation. I hope I've made that clear. These Words of Jesus point to just who we are without Him... they show us our hopeless condition without Him. We need to remember this...I know who I am. I know I am a sinner! But I'm not about to stand before you today and confess my private sins. But I have them...so do you.

Wouldn't it be terrible if by some stroke of Heavenly happenstance that a giant screen could come down from this great ceiling and instead of the praise songs seen in so many churches... there was instead a slide show of your life...complete with the soundtrack. Every day of your life would show... every single thing. Who would dare let it play for all to see?

And yet, this is exactly how it is when Christ preaches! He, "before whom all things are laid bare"... knows it all. Before Him your life *is* an open book...just like those to whom He preached these words originally so many years ago. They knew their sins too... but they covered them up... putting on masks... righteous disguises...and so do we.

You *won't* meditate on the Commandments because they *always* conclude you "Guilty!" And the very *last* thing you want to do...even in Lent...is to admit and confess your sin...as least specifically. You can say with relative ease... "I, a poor miserable sinner." But we are not quite so comfortable that we would want to number each sin and call them out by name! That's entirely too painful!

But that's how folks live nowadays... always trying to put our best foot forward always to be seen in the best light... people engross themselves in activities, groups, music, things, clothes... and every other kind of thing to make a good appearance and feel better about life. It's no accident that people get so "in to it." Whatever "it" is. Often the intent of such a flourish of activity is designed to help one forget who and what we really are. People become pretenders. The temptation of the heart wants the easy way...we want what makes us feel good now...perhaps it would be easier and more friendly to visitors here at St. John if we would loosen up a little...perhaps put away with the Word of this Liturgy... these structured, purposeful ceremonies

that make us look at our real condition so that we confess what we really are... **that force** us to look in the face of God's Law... **bringing us** to your knees.

Temptation is always to shy away from the realities of life and Christ's Word ...**to look** and even yearn for different teaching... **different liturgy or** even a different form of worship... **different music... different sermons** other than those dry old doctrinaire Law and Gospel proclamations. **Instead of the** Living Voice of Christ in His Word.. **we are** tempted rather to hear Aaron and the message people want to hear... **instead of** what they need to hear... **sermons about "Jesus the CEO: Biblical Methods for Managing Your Business", "David's Five Steps for Building Healthy Relationships", or "Forty Days of Purpose."**

Our Synod has become all abuzz, packed with classes on diet, health, and exercise. **And now when** our churches are calling pastors... **the first** priority is often to get someone who is dynamic...**charismatic and** creative...rather than one who is faithful to God's Word! **Next thing you** know we are writing and reading articles in Synod publications about the churches that are **"Ablaze"** and the common thread to every article is simply how **"happy"** everyone there is. **Rarely will you** read anything dealing with the realities and importance of Word and Sacrament Ministry.

And yet when tempted with such thoughts... **Christ's sermon** in our parable calls us to repent lest... **"our minds being set on earthly things, our "end is destruction."** **To the Hebrews** of Isaiah's day... **it all** came true... **their kingdom** was taken from them. **And to the Jews** of Jesus' day... **those who** rejected the Gospel of Christ... **the remnants** of what used to be God's Temple was pounded to bits... **no stone** left standing upon another just as He said... **and the Jews** were left without a an altar or a sacrifice... **they had** rejected Christ's sacrifice... **and rejecting** the Giver they rejected the gift... **and rejecting** the giver they rejected the One who sent Him. **And the Kingdom** was taken from them.

We know that God came into the world as a baby... **the child** of the Virgin Mary. **He lived His** whole life in perfect obedience to God's every Command. **He always did** that which pleased His Father. **Even at His** trial He asked, **"Who convicts me of sin?"** **They all stood** silent. **They knew the Truth.** **It's such a** tragedy. **They knew who** He was and they rejected the Lord of Life.

But of you "dear friends, we are confident of better things... in your case...things that accompany salvation." **To you God** has said, **"I have called you by name you are mine"** **Of you** it is written [1 Peter 2:10] **"You, in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God: which now have obtained mercy."** **You were aliens** to the Kingdom of God because of sins...**now you** have been made God's people according to His Grace and through His Son.

Through Israel's rejection, God in His mercy has given you the privilege of knowing Him. **He had promised** Abraham sons as numerous as the stars... **and yet** time and time again He came to His vineyard expecting to find choice grapes... **true sons** of Israel...**just like** Father Abraham...**yet He found none...He found only those rejecting** the faith of Abraham... **the Kingdom** was taken from them and the temple in ruins is the proof...**God's protection... His presence** was taken from

them. **And the Lord God says, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."**

That's the Upsidedownness...the Insideoutness of the Kingdom... for those whom He 's Chosen reject Him... and those whom He'd appointed for destruction become "graced" as His Chosen Ones. The First Chosen reject the Cornerstone... and those *who* don't so much as know there's even a building* become His Holy Temples, a Holy Priesthood.

By His incredible Grace... may God again today by His most precious Body and Blood... affirm in your hearts and minds that He Himself in the flesh has suffered and died on a cross for you... having become sin for you. That living-well-water of baptism ran over you...poured out on your forehead... and God Himself slipped over your head His wedding garment... His righteousness... His perfection... His Grace and your sins are "as far as the east from the west" because He says, "I will remember your transgressions no more." And in their place He gives us His personal forgiveness in His Body and Blood... proclaiming His death, indeed His most holy Passion and His victory over death, In the Name of the Father, and of the X Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

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