



Preach **Matthew** sermon

(Year A Proper 22)

RELATED

Isa 5:1-7
Psalm 80:8-16
Phil 3:4b-14

CONTINUOUS

Ex 20:1-4,7-9,12-20
Psalm 19
Phil 3:4b-14

Matthew 21:33-46 (NIV) Parable of the Rented Vineyard

Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'this is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes?"

"Therefore I tell you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet."

Have you or your friends ever gone on holiday, and left your teenage son or daughter at home - when they are old enough of course! You may have some personal memories but there are some horror stories too. One parent came home to find an enormous party had been held - which since it was not an enormous flat was bound to lead to trouble - which there was, the police had been called. The carefully decorated and furnished flat was trashed, relationships were damaged and there was a real breach of trust. There was no loss of life fortunately just major alcohol poisoning, but the daughter won't be left alone again!

In this parable the owner provides a lovely vineyard; he plants it, it builds a wall round it, even provides the winepress and a watchtower and then leaves it in the care of tenants. The metaphor that Jesus refers too is the Kingdom that God has entrusted to Israel, but she killed the prophets, the servants, and finally will seize God's Son and kill him. It is also a picture of stewardship; that the God who provides all we need, in the provision of this world, and all that is in it, also extends his trust to us and leaving it in our care. But we need to note that all we have is given on trust by God, we shall be accountable to God for how we have cared for it, and his messengers, and that we allow God to collect his due at Harvest time.

We sometimes forget this! We say in the offertory prayer, "Yours Lord is the greatness, the power and the glory and the majesty, for everything in Heaven and Earth is yours. All things come from you, and of your own do we give you." But we don't really act as if we really mean it, like the teenage daughter, we are so busy having a good time that we ignore the truth of accountability!

We probably wouldn't associate ourselves with the tenants. After all we wouldn't treat God's



servants so badly would we? We wouldn't try to avoid giving the fruits of the Harvest to God, we wouldn't kill his Son to claim the vineyard for our own.

Yet the Jewish leaders did realise that Jesus was talking about them. They knew that their predecessors had treated the prophets badly and it is a real irony that they realised that the parable was about them but still plotted about Jesus rather than think about whether he was God's son and what this would mean for them, for Israel, and for God's kingdom.

We have the benefit of knowing the end of the story - that Jesus really is God's son, that he was killed but rose again, and that the kingdom is now open to all who believe and trust in Him.

So there is an even greater obligation on us to consider our duties as tenants - in both our stewardship of the natural world and environment but also our giving. Our giving is an act of grace, an act of love, faith and trust, and as an act of sharing in God's love for the world. But it is also an obligation.

Everything we have, we possess, we enjoy belongs to God. He is the absent landlord in our lives in terms of our material possessions and control over them. He is very near to us spiritually and physically in our Eucharist, in our fellowship, our worship and in our family prayer. But he does not exercise any control or restraint over us in terms of how we use the material and physical blessings he gives to us. He does remind us, and send messages to us through our church and through his messengers that the fruits of the harvest are due. But he does not stop the harvest if we fail to respond, our employment or pension doesn't suddenly cease, our home isn't impounded, and our family seized. God isn't like that. God loves us, he trusts us, and cares for us with a passion beyond our understanding. One day we will see God face to face and account for our care for the world, the kingdom, our relationships and our care for the material possessions he has blessed us with. There is a hard message in this parable because grace and gift are not incompatible with judgement. There are consequences of failing to fulfil our obligations - to return to God a due portion of what is rightfully his.

Core

For those of us in leadership positions in the church this passage is a statement of who and what we are before God, stewards of all God has given. Unfortunately there is a great temptation to want to possess all that we are simply called to steward. The sadness is that in the desire to possess we can lose our liberty, a cage is a cage even if the bars are made of gold. Albert Schweitzer once wrote, "if we have something that we cannot give away it is not a possession any longer – it possesses us".

The parable goes further and we cannot escape its force. Our decision to withhold has consequences. The kingdom is taken and given to others. The reality is that our church's ministry will be hindered, diminished even ended by our failure to adequately fund it through our giving. We are stewards all of we have, including the church and we should not be withholding from God what is his anyway. We need to think and pray very hard about the proportion of the income we are entrusted with that we give to God through his church for the work of the kingdom.





Congregation

For our congregation this parable is a reminder that our giving, even when we give proportionately does not mean the rest is ours but a reminder that everything we have comes from God. As Jesus indicates in the gospels, what we do with our money says something about what is in our hearts. If we want to acknowledge that God is Lord of our lives then we need to show this in how we give and how we live in stewardship of all that he gives us and in care for his world. We need to ensure that the work of the kingdom and the church is well cared for by giving realistically and proportionately as God blesses us.

Fringe

For those here who worship with us from time to time it is important to realise that all are called to be stewards of what God has given to us. Stewards do not own but they do benefit from what is entrusted to them. The vineyard was fully provided for and then entrusted to tenants. The words around money should be joy, blessing, privilege and celebration. If we withhold from God what is due to him it is not a matter of breaking a rule but a breach of God's trust. If you believe that God is the creator and redeemer of the world then it is a privilege to give to his work through the church to acknowledge and thank him for all he blesses you with!

To get back to the party and the absent parent! Things can be repaired or replaced, houses can be redecorated. A parent's love means that such things will be forgiven - although may be not forgotten. But it's very traumatic for all concerned mending a broken trust. So just think about how great the trust is that's been given to us - a whole world, a whole kingdom! A God who loves us more than any parent could - let us respond gladly and carefully as good stewards.

Amen

