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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22A)

October 8, 2017

Text: Matthew 21:33–46

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob composed a song of rejection and suffering. Musical lyrics of sorrow, regret, and pain. “What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Is. 5:4). The Lord God of heaven and earth loved His OT people, Israel. He gave all that they needed and more. But they rejected His love and His gifts. Through Isaiah the prophet, the Lord God sings a love song for Israel. A love song of sorrow and regret. What more was there to do for my vineyard?

Well, there was more God the Father could do. He could send His beloved Son to woo His people back unto Himself. Matthew 21 is the retelling of the Lord Jesus, the beloved Son of God the Father, entering into Jerusalem as the King of the Jews. His purpose? To win back for Himself His beloved people and to establish His heavenly kingdom in the hearts and minds of all men, women, and children. It's Holy Week. Since that Triumphal Entry, the Lord Jesus has been challenged at every turn by the chief priest and elders of the people. They've been asking Jesus about His authority? Who do you think you are to teach publicly, perform miracles, clear out the Temple with whips and cords, and challenge our position as the leaders of God's people?

Matthew 21 is another stanza in the Lord's song of rejection, sorrow, and regret. A few days later, Jesus would add yet another stanza, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37).

In today's reading, the Lord takes Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard and recasts it in the form of a parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and did everything necessary to ensure its success. The stones were removed from the fields, a protecting wall was erected, and the best vines were planted. Once prepared, the vineyard is leased out to tenants (vs. 33) while the vineyard owner leaves for another country.

The tenants' job was simple. Take care of the vines and the grapes will produce. Work the vineyard, care for it, and it will be successful. And then enjoy the fruits of vineyard and the master's abundance. All should be well. But trouble begins almost immediately.

In Isaiah's song, Israel is represented by the vineyard. The Lord God of heaven and earth is the vineyard owner who plants and loves the vineyard. Listen to God's agonizing complaint against Israel, "What was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?" (vs. 4). What more could God have done for His people? He gave them a promised land flowing with milk and honey. They had the covenants and the promises. They had the assurance of a glorious present and the hope for an even more glorious future with the coming of the Messiah. Instead, they rejected God's Word, killed His prophets, and so often worshipped false gods of every sort.

Our Lord's parabolic song from Matthew 21 contains a similar tale of disappointment. God the Father is represented by the vineyard owner. The tenants represent Israel. Servants are sent to gather the fruits of the vineyard. The servants represent the priests and prophets of old, who, by and large, were rejected, beaten, and even stoned to death (vs. 34–36). In the end, Israel rejected God's love.

This is where Jesus makes a unique addition to the Lord's love song of sorrow and rejection. It begins in vs. 37, "Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" Finally, there's emotion and pathos in that word. Finally, they will respect my son. Through Him, they will see and experience My divine, holy love. Vs. 38, "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'" And so, they kill the Son.

Remember, Jesus is telling this story to the chief priest and elders of Israel. They are the tenants who plot the Son's death and ultimately will see that it's accomplished. But here's where the glory and wonder of God's love is revealed.

The Son indeed dies, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. A few short days after telling this parable, Jesus is crucified and raised from the dead. In the parable, the wicked tenants said, "Let us kill him and have his inheritance." Those words come to pass!!! Because Jesus dies and rises again, His heavenly inheritance is made available to the world. To everyone!!!! To you, me, your neighbors, friends, loved ones, enemies. Everyone!

The chief priests, scribes, and elders of Israel were the instrumental means by which the Lord Jesus was crucified on Good Friday. By that redemptive death and wondrous resurrection from the dead, God the Father won for Himself a redeemed kingdom of righteousness, faith, and eternal life. The Lord Jesus Himself, in vs. 42, quotes Psalm 118:22–23, in order to demonstrate from the Scriptures themselves that the rejection of the Son is the means by which the Father establishes His eternal kingdom. “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (vs. 42).

This is the Lord’s doing! The sending of the Son in love. His Gospel ministry of grace and forgiveness. The healings. His bitter suffering willingly endured for the sake of His corrupted people. His death for their sins. His resurrection for their eternal life. This is the Lord’s doing. It’s marvelous in our eyes. For that rejected stone, that rejected Son, is the cornerstone upon which our hopes are built. Our joy. The forgiveness of our sins. Our victory.

This parable is not simply a sad song retelling Israel’s historic rejection of Jesus and His authority to redeem the world. It’s about the love that God the Father has for you and me and for all people. He gives His most beloved and precious Son for us. Finally, they will respect My Son. Upon Him and Him alone, all glory, love, and salvation rest. This is the Lord’s doing. It is marvelous.

God the Father builds His Church upon this marvelous work of redemptive love. This congregation is established upon this work of the Lord Jesus. And so our hymns, liturgy, and worship directs us to this marvelous work of the Lord’s doing. We have no other song to sing than this divine love song of redeeming grace and salvation. These sacraments, so cherished in our midst, are the signs and tokens of our Lord’s divine love. (Immanuel: The baptism which Joden received this morning is the very love of God being poured out upon him. God the Father claimed Joden as His own redeemed son because His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus, suffered rejection and death so Joden can be an inheritor of His resurrection life.) This is the Lord’s doing, it is marvelous in our eyes.

But there is also a solemn warning spoken by our Lord Jesus in vs. 43–44, “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. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” The kingdom of God established in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be manifested in a

people who produce the fruits of that kingdom. In other words, the Church will be established where Christ's Word is taught in its truth and purity and where it is heard and believed in true faith. That is the Lord's doing.

But we must never fall into the error of thinking that we are entitled to be living members of Christ's kingdom because of our family history or lineage or even because we are listed on a congregation's membership roster. The Lord Jesus is teaching us that there must be the fruits of His kingdom, the fruits of repentance, faith, and obedience. Remember, however, they are fruits of love flowing out of hearts and minds made new by the redemptive grace of the Son.

We have Christ's promise that He will build and care for His beautiful vineyard, His Church. The solemn warning is that we are to live in it faithfully or it will be given to another.

God the Father's vineyard is open to all people. Everyone is invited in. Jesus has provided for every conceivable need. You, dear people of God, are the vineyard of the Lord Jesus Christ, elect and precious in His eyes. May you grow and prosper until the Day you see your beloved Savior face to face in His splendor and glory. In the meantime, we sing the Lord's love song of redemption. It is the Lord's doing and it's marvelous in our eyes!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.