



Capital News
Capital Campaign Committee
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Caring for God's House - Together



Excerpts from the October 8 Sermon from the Pastor
Scripture: Matthew 21:33-46

³³ “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went away. ³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Then he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ 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.’ ⁴² Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the

Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? ⁴³ "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits. ⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Pastor Kathy's Message

Jesus could shy away from these questions, refusing to engage with the chief priest and his colleagues, but instead he confronts them. Not just once, but a couple of times. They are having difficulty understanding his answers.

And, once again, He tells a beautifully crafted parable. It is about a vineyard owner and tenants. This owner has gone to great trouble to prepare this vineyard for them. He planted the vines, put in a fence around it, dug a winepress, even built a watchtower. He obviously cared deeply that this be a productive vineyard and wanted his tenants to have a good environment in which to do their work. Then in a typical practice, he leases it out, and they farm it and pay him with a share of the harvest. He then leaves town. Again, not unusual.

The time comes for the harvest and as expected the owner send slaves to collect his portion of the harvest. This is when the story starts to twist. The tenants, thinking that if they dispose of the slaves, all the harvest will be theirs. So, they beat, kill and stone the slaves. When the owner hears of this he sends another group of slaves, he gets the same result.

So, in another act of foolishness he sends his son on this errand, thinking maybe then they will see he means business. But, of course all they see is the future heir; if they kill him, the vineyard belongs to them. Jesus then asks those listening —“what do you think the vineyard owner will do with those tenants?” They answer —“ he will kill them and get new tenants who will respect him and pay him as agreed.”

Suddenly, it dawns on those religious authorities that he is talking about them! Why did Jesus continue to engage with them — why not just walk away? They weren't going to change! Why continue to confront them?

It's one of the things we love about our Savior. Jesus just couldn't give up on them. For he loved them as much as he loved everyone else. And just as he doesn't give up on the woman caught in adultery or the tax collectors or you and me, he did not give up on the Pharisees. So with each parable he seeks to reach them, and redirect them back toward God. His relationship with them was not one of condemnation, but recovery. He knew they wanted to be faithful, but were headed away from God and he wanted to bring them back home.

And he wanted them to see what they were doing to themselves. By their

words and actions, they were not producing the fruit of the kingdom of God. They were excluding themselves from the promises of God. God was not shutting the door, they were letting it close in their faces.

In Jesus' parables it is important to find ourselves and it is simple but difficult to find ourselves in this one. For we too are tenants-- we have been given a vineyard to tend. But it isn't ours. We are stewards charged with caring for the vines that they might produce good fruit.

What are the fruits of the kingdom? There are many: love, relationship, grace and forgiveness, justice and peace, generosity, compassion, wisdom and truth, presence and healing, joy, thanksgiving, humility, reconciliation...and more. All those things that glorify God and advance the purposes of God in the world.

We've all been given vineyards in the lives we have. We are also stewards of the vineyard called the church. As such in our lives individually and together we are to be growing these fruits. Just as in a garden, there is always something that needs attention, whether it is weeding or hoeing or watering or fertilizing. We cannot neglect a part of our vineyard and expect a good harvest.

There are all kinds of ways we can exclude ourselves from the kingdom harvest, the sharing in the abundance of God's goodness. When we need to be right, or need to be in control, when we need to feel like we have all the answers; all ways of living that will lead us away from God's purposes. When we question whether we're good enough, smart enough, enough of whatever the world says we should be, we are forgetting the task the master has given us. When we make judge others, carry grudges, resentments or anger we are not tending what God has given us stewardship over- and no fruit will come from these. When we have more criticism and cynicism than thanksgiving and celebration- what will grow in that soil?

And it's all things we do to ourselves. And what the religious leaders were doing to themselves. Which is why Jesus cares enough to confront them and us, and remind us what we're to be about as God's stewards.

We often speak about stewardship of the earth or stewardship in terms of our giving to the church. But this is stewardship of our lives- this is the vineyard that had been entrusted to us. How are our attitudes and opinion and ideas cultivating God's purposes in our living? How can we embrace our belovedness as a gift to be shared? The same is true for our life together as a community of faith.

With these tenants it was an attitude together with a desire that led to an action that caused the whole relationship with the owner to break down. And while we might harvest some of the fruit of the kingdom, if we're honest there are parts of our vineyard that are neglected and thus nothing is growing there.

Jesus loves us enough to want us to fully enjoy the fruits of the kingdom.

Who enjoys being angry or guilt ridden or judgmental? Yet we all know how much better our lives are when we are in relationships of love and compassion, when we can offer grace and forgiveness, when we are generous with ourselves, our lives and our resources. That is some delicious fruit! And that is what our Savior wants for us, and wants it enough to do all he can, including giving up his life, so that we might have it in abundance.

So, we can respond like the Pharisees, who wanted to arrest Jesus and get him out of circulation for revealing truths they did not want to see about themselves; or we can open our hearts and ears to the truth of Jesus' words and reflect on what kind of stewards we are and how we can tend the vineyard in our care, knowing there is always room for a bigger harvest, always a place for more peace and justice, more wisdom and healing. We just need to tend those parts of our vineyards.

Jesus loved the Pharisees and refused to give up on them. In the same way he loves us and refuses to give up on us...the least we can do is listen with open hearts. Amen.

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain." Psalm 127:1
Thank you for your support!

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