

Text: Luke 20:9-20

Sermon Title: Back to the Vineyard

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Vicar Michael Larson

3/21/2010

In our Gospel parable today Jesus tells a story. A story of a man who plants a vineyard. A beautiful vineyard with rolling hills and green meadows. The trees sway in the cool breeze and grape vines weave throughout the vineyard, with perfectly ripe fruits. The vineyard is naturally filled with the sounds of the created order, the hum of cicadas, chirping sparrows and the pleasant psalms of songbirds.

The owner of the vineyard, not wanting to delight in these things by himself, gave it all away. It was all so good, all so sweet. Yes, He saw that it was “very good,” so he desired to hand it over to tenants so they may enjoy it with Him. And what joy it gave the owner of the vineyard to share in His vineyard, and hand over all those pleasant trees and meadows, animals, and musical sounds in his creation.

The owner of the vineyard is the heavenly Father. And He plants His man and woman at the source of His creation, to walk through the vineyard, picking sweet grapes from the vine. And their work was joy. No thorns and thistles here. No sweat and toil.

For in that vineyard, the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the vineyard, as was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The first words to man were “take eat...take drink...surely eat of every tree of the vineyard, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in that day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” God did not speak from Mt. Sinai or a burning bush. He was not concealed from their eyes, for eyes were open to him as He is. As He is as creator - as Father, whom shares everything with his offspring, even sharing in His very life. Eyes open to a Lord of love and mercy. He was not an invisible voice, but an incarnate voice - walking and talked with his creation.

The Lord from the very beginning has lived as one whom gives. Gives all to his tenants, his dear children in creation, sharing in his very image and likeness. He lives as the vinedresser, the giver of all good gifts.

But dear Christians, we tenants have no return on those divine gifts. In today’s parable, the owner of the vineyard sends one servant after another. The first helper servant Eve, Adam fails to love, cherish, and hold. He failed to love, serve, and protect her. They ate that forbidden fruit and death entered into our story. From dust you are and to dust you shall return. Now Abel was

a keeper of the sheep, God's very servant and shepherd. Cain rose up and killed his brother. And God began sending servants one after the other, to speak his peace and His Holy Word. They were all rejected and cast out one after the other. But from the beginning the owner of the vineyard had promised, "I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, "This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours. And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."

Yes those naughty, murderous tenants of God's vineyard yelled out "let us kill the son and take His inheritance." Only God could think up a plan like this. Only God would do something so strangely magnificent. That he uses even us murderous tenants to bring about His salvation. They yelled "let us kill this man, so that we may have what is his." So they cast him out of the vineyard, to Golgotha, to crucify His son.

Rather than giving those evil tenants what they rightfully deserved, God in his infinite goodness used evil to do that which is infinitely good. And this, Dear Christians is the foolishness of the cross. God uses sinful people like us to deliver Christ and His gifts to the whole world.

It is now a pious plea – a gracious and lovely prayer, to pray "Lord give me your inheritance...give me all that you have...your righteousness and your innocence and your blessedness...give me all that you have for I am in need."

This is the good news. You are the heir to that inheritance. And it has been made yours. You have respected and loved the beloved Son, by listening to his voice and receiving his gifts. Even in our rebellion, the son has desired to reconcile us all.

Christ Jesus redeemed us from the curse of death by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." The owner of the vineyard sent the son. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. The tree of life has always been Jesus Christ. In this Lenten passion – in His Holy sufferings and death, He tenderly invites us toward the altar. God Himself, drank of the bitter drink and ate of the bitter herb. He took our share, placing on his own head the thorns and thistles that were rightfully ours. And He made them rightfully his.

For now we know the end of this parable and even today, we celebrate his rising from the grave. Resurrected, offering all his inheritance. For here, the vineyard is budding. The vines are blooming, and bursting forth. I am the vine and you are the branches, He says. Whoever abides in me shall bear fruit and live.

This coming Easter has now come to you. To us. Unwise stewards and unjust tenants. God becomes man, the eternal Word becomes flesh to bring us back. To restore us to the rivers of Eden, the paradise of being a faithful tenant. The paradise of eternal sonship.

He pours the fruit of life down our throats. Drink of it all of you. By being pressed to the tree, God pours out the rivers of Eden, streaming forth into a world drowned in rebellion and violence. He is the owner of the vineyard, He is the Son whom is sent. He is the vine in which all of us branches find our life. He is the tree of life! And when we eat and drink our eyes our opened up.

Opened not to good and evil, or sin and rebellion. But eyes opened up to the author and perfecter of our faith. So come let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. And wherever He sits, there shall we sit.

And let us fix our ears on our Lord whom does not speak from a burning bush or a pillar of fire. But speak directly...for He sent His son, to speak all that needs to be spoken – speaks all that we need. A son who shares in the full fullness of the Father..a son whom makes the mystery known to us...and completes the story of salvation. Come, eat, and drink, let there be light. Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. And the Son's inheritance is yours.

Today, in anticipation of Easter morning, “it is good” – “it is very good.” Good for us all. For here there is joy that has no end. Psalms burst forth, and the Father's vineyard is opened to us all. In the name of Jesus. Amen.