

**PRIVILEGED AND GRACED TO TAKE CARE OF GOD'S VINEYARD**  
**Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent 2022**  
**Luke 20:9-20**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel we just heard read, Luke 20:9-20: **Then Jesus began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it out to tenant-farmers and left home for a long time. <sup>10</sup> At the right time he sent a servant to the tenant-farmers that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. However, the tenant-farmers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> Then he sent another servant. They also beat him, treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> Then he sent a third servant. They wounded this one, too and threw him out. <sup>13</sup> Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What am I to do? I shall send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.'**

<sup>14</sup> **"However, when the tenant-farmers saw him, they discussed it among themselves. They said, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours!'**

<sup>15</sup> **"They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.**

**"Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy these tenant-farmers and give the vineyard to others."**

**When the people heard this, they said, "May this not happen!"**

<sup>17</sup> **Jesus looked straight at them and asked, "Therefore, what does this Scripture-passage mean: 'The Stone that the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone'? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that Stone will be dashed in pieces and, if that Stone falls on anyone, It will scatter him like dust."**

<sup>19</sup> **The scribes and the Chief Priests looked for a way to lay hands on Him immediately, because they knew that He had spoken this parable against them but were afraid of the people.**

<sup>20</sup> **They kept a close watch on Him and sent spies who pretended to be righteous men, that they might catch Him in what He said, to hand Him over to the power and authority of the governor.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are all familiar with the words from our text. Here is a quick summary: Some tenant-farmers are supposed to take care of a vineyard for its owner, but instead, they take over the vineyard for themselves. They beat and mistreat the servants whom the vineyard owner sends to them, and they even kill the owner's son. Jesus then asks the question, **"what will the owner of the vineyard do to them?"**

This is what we shall find out today, and in doing so, we shall also find out how this story involves us as we consider that question: **"what will the owner of the vineyard do"?**

The parable starts out: **"A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it out to tenant-farmers and left home for a long time."** This is a typical start of a story for Jesus. There is an owner or a master who leaves his house or his property - in this case, his vineyard - in the care of people who are to manage his property for him, to do something productive with it. Now, if we decode the elements of the story so far - the vineyard, the owner, and the tenant-farmers - it's pretty safe to say, based on the rest of the Bible and Jesus' teaching, that it would go like this: The owner, the man who plants the vineyard, is God. The vineyard He plants would be His chosen people, who are to do His will - at that point, the nation of Israel. The tenant-farmers represent especially the leadership of Israel, throughout its history, up to and including the religious leaders of Jesus' day - some of whom are standing there, hearing Jesus tell this story.

Everybody hearing Jesus would have instantly identified the main features of this story in the same way. After all, this was not the first time someone had used the image of a vineyard and its owner like this. It had been done before. In the Book of Isaiah, there was a very famous and familiar passage that uses vineyard imagery. It's Isaiah 5:1-7, and it goes like this: *"Let me sing, about the One whom I love, a song of the One whom I love about His vineyard! The One whom I love had a vineyard on a fertile hilltop. <sup>2</sup> He dug it over, removed its stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watch-tower in the middle of it and cut out a wine-vat in it. Then He waited for it to produce grapes, but it produced bad grapes.*

*<sup>3</sup> "Now, you who are living in Jerusalem and you men of Judah, decide, please, between Me and My vineyard! <sup>4</sup> What more should have been done for My vineyard than I have already done in it? When I waited for it to produce grapes, why did it produce only bad grapes? <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, please let Me inform you what I shall do to My vineyard! I shall tear away its hedge, and it will be destroyed. I shall break down its wall, and it will be trampled down. <sup>6</sup> I shall make it a wasteland. It*

*will not be pruned or cultivated. Briars and thorn-bushes will grow up. I shall also command the clouds not to let any rain fall on it.*

<sup>7</sup> *For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the family of Israel, and the men of Judah are the plantation in which He had taken pleasure. He had waited for legal decisions but saw legal infringements. He had waited for justice but heard calls for help.”*

This is the imagery that Jesus is building on. The vineyard is Israel who belongs to the Lord God. He has done everything necessary for the vineyard that it should produce good grapes, *but it doesn't*. So the Lord's judgment will fall on that vineyard, and it will be destroyed, which is what happened historically. Jerusalem and Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The temple was destroyed, and the people were taken into exile.

By God's grace and mercy, after some years, the people were able to come back from exile, back to Judah and Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple and be the Lord's vineyard once again, down to the time of Jesus. But the vineyard imagery here in Jesus' story would have rung a bell for His hearers and would have reminded them of how it was used in Isaiah, namely that there, it did not speak well of Israel but rather was a prophecy of rebuke and judgment.

So it is here in Jesus' parable. Israel's history as God's vineyard is not a shining one of faithfulness to the Lord's will, of doing what they ought to have done. Jesus summarises hundreds of years of this rebellious history in just a few sentences: **“At the right time he sent a servant to the tenant-farmers that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. However, the tenant-farmers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> Then he sent another servant. They also beat him, treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> Then he sent a third servant. They wounded this one, too and threw him out.”**

Now we have new characters in the story: The servants. The servants were the ones whom the owner had sent to the tenant-farmers to receive from them what they ought to have rendered back to the owner. The servants here would represent the prophets, all the messengers whom the Lord had sent to Israel over the centuries to call them to repentance, to call them to faithfulness.

But what had Israel done to these prophets, these servants of the Lord? They had beat them and mistreated them. The prophets had come looking for good fruit, but the people of Israel had sent them away *empty-handed*. This had happened time after time. They had grumbled and disobeyed Moses. Likewise, other prophets, like Elijah and Isaiah and Jeremiah, were not listened to. The kings and the priests and the false prophets had despised, rejected, and persecuted them. So far, Jesus' story matches up with the historical record.

Now what is so amazing about this, in terms of the story, is how the owner of the vineyard *would let it go on like this for so long*. You would think, after the tenant-farmers had abused even the first of his servants, let alone two or three, that the owner of the vineyard would send in the troops and have them arrested or killed and take the vineyard away from them. But this just shows the patience and the long-suffering of God, that He does not strike us all down right away, even though we rebellious sinners deserve it.

Perhaps what's even more amazing is what happens next in the story: **“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What am I to do? I shall send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.’”** This is amazing! After the brutal treatment that the owner's servants received, he now sends in his son! Who would do that? But what would not happen in real life, Jesus uses to illustrate His point. God is now sending His own Son - namely, Jesus Himself - to the vineyard, to Israel, and we have seen what kind of a reception He has been getting. The leaders of Israel have rejected Him. They hate Him. Even now, as Jesus is telling this parable - which is in Jerusalem during Holy Week - the tension is mounting, the conflict is escalating, and Jesus' enemies are conspiring against Him **“because they knew that He had spoken this parable against them.”**

Jesus knows what they are thinking. He speaks what is in their minds: **“However, when the tenant-farmers saw him, they discussed it among themselves. They said, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours!’”** The scribes and the chief priests wanted to get Jesus out of the way because He was ruining their prestige and their position, and their power among the people. Jesus was exposing their hypocrisy and their selfish pride. They truly believed that if they could get Jesus out of the way, then it could go back to business as normal. So they wanted to kill Him, which is what would happen just a couple of days later. **“They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”** On Good Friday, the leaders of Israel handed Jesus over to the governor, Pontius Pilate. They demanded His crucifixion, and He was killed. Jesus knew what they were planning and plotting to do.

Once the tenant-farmers have done this to the owner's son, what then? Jesus asks, **“Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them?”** and then answers, **“He will come and destroy these tenant-farmers and give the vineyard to**

**others.”** And that, too, is what ended up happening. Forty years later, Jerusalem, the city that killed the prophets and now had added to it killing God’s Son, would be destroyed, including the temple.

So this parable of the tenants is a parable of judgment on unbelieving Jerusalem, who had rejected her Messiah, God’s own Son, Jesus Christ. The vineyard was turned over to others. God’s people on earth would no longer be the nation of Israel, the Jews, but would become the Church of the New Testament, composed of *both* Jews and Gentiles, of all those who trust in Christ their Saviour, and that’s where we come in. You and I, we who trust in Christ - the church, we are God’s vineyard now. What shall we do when God sends His servants to us? He sends His preachers, His messengers, calling us back to God, calling us to repent of our sins, calling us to faithfulness and fruitfulness as God’s people. Shall we listen humbly and heed God’s Word, or shall we resist and rebel and not listen to what God is telling us? The parable of the tenants, including its outcome, the judgment that fell on Jerusalem, serves as a permanent warning to us to not let the Word of God go in one ear and out the other, to not harden our hearts but rather to humbly receive God’s Word as it is preached and brought to us.

And really, when you know you’re a sinner, and you have no righteousness in yourself, *why in the world would you want to resist that Word?* For this is good news that God’s messengers bring. It is the Word of a God that tells us how God is indeed patient and long-suffering. He has not struck us down as we deserve, for all our rebelliousness. Instead, He has sent His own Son, His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, precisely into the buzzsaw of hostility and rejection and death to suffer and die for us. Jesus has taken the judgment you and I deserve. He has died so that we may live. God’s own Son has won our forgiveness by shedding His holy blood on the cross for us. His resurrection guarantees our own resurrection and eternal life since we have been joined to Jesus through baptism and faith, *the free gift of God.*

Yes, dear friends, we are those “others” in the story, the ones now privileged and graced to take care of God’s vineyard. And by God’s grace, and because of Christ, what then will the owner of the vineyard do to us? He will give us everything necessary to make us fruitful as His people in Word and Sacrament. He will bless our vineyard, for it is His vineyard, after all. He will keep us faithful and keep calling us back to Himself by sending us His servants to bring us His Word. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will forgive our sins. He will keep us in the one true faith. He will graciously give us the inheritance of His Son: resurrection and eternal life. God will raise our bodies on the Last Day, and give us life together and forever with Christ and with all of God’s people. So take hold of this promise, for this is what the owner of the vineyard will do! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty and ever-living King of all creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father, whom all the heavenly hosts praise and glorify, hear our prayer.

We thank You, heavenly Father, for Your limitless love in the gift of Christ Your Son, for the sacrifice of His life on the cross for us, for the promise of eternal life through His death and resurrection, and for the cleansing of our consciences from dead works by His obedience.

Increase our joy in Your rich blessings: the forgiveness of our sins, deliverance from death and the power of the devil, and the assurance of everlasting life, which Jesus’ crucifixion have obtained for us.

We thank You that in Christ You have spoken to us the words of life. Inspire us to love and worship Him in spirit and in truth. Give us that faith that sees in Him the eternal Godhead, the everlasting I AM, the one who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Grant that we may always trust in His mercy, be faithful to His Word, and obey His commandments, and honour Him by losing our lives for His sake and for the Gospel’s, as He lost His life to gain us.

In mercy, cleanse and strengthen Your Church, that it may be saved from all weakness and failure, and be filled with power for holy service. Govern the nations on earth, that people everywhere may live in harmony with their fellowmen and serve one another’s needs. Pour out Your grace on our homes and on all schools, that the young may be trained for a useful life on earth, and be made ready for the life to come. Bless all who work honestly with mind and hand to provide those things we need for this life. Give all people everywhere joy in doing their daily work, and grant that they may do it as those who are accountable to You.

Help us to use our abilities and possessions faithfully, for everything belongs to You. Forgive us for being selfish and for misusing our gifts. Comfort the suffering, the deprived, the burdened, and the aged. Be the help of the needy, the protector of the helpless, and the Saviour of all people.

We pray for all those in our own parish who are unwell or recovering from illness. Let Your mercy shine forth on them and remind them of Your unfailing mercy, and in Your own time and according to Your gracious will, restore them to health, or given them the patience to bear with their affliction.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

#### FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Isaiah 43:16-21

<sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD has said — who makes a road through the sea and a path through the mighty waters, <sup>17</sup> who leads out chariots and horses, an army and reinforcements together, so that they lie down and do not get back up, so that they are extinguished and snuffed out like a wick — <sup>18</sup> “Do not remember former things and do not pay attention to events of long ago! <sup>19</sup> Look! I am going to do a new thing. It is springing up already. Do you not recognise it? Indeed, I shall make a roadway through the wilderness and rivers through the desert. <sup>20</sup> Wild animals, jackals and ostriches, will honour Me, because I shall provide water in the wilderness and rivers through the desert to give drink to My own chosen people, <sup>21</sup> the people whom I have formed for Myself. They will proclaim My praise.”

Philippians 3:4b-14

<sup>4b</sup> although I myself have confidence even in what is bodily. If anyone else thinks that he has confidence in something bodily, I have more. <sup>5</sup> I was circumcised on the eighth day; I belong to the race of Israel, to the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents. Concerning the Law, I was a Pharisee. <sup>6</sup> As for zeal, I used to persecute the church. As for the righteousness that is in the Law I was blameless. <sup>7</sup> However, I have reckoned those things that were gains to me as loss because of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> However, more than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have lost all things and consider them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to be found in Him, not having my own righteousness that is from the Law but having the righteousness that is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ, the power of His resurrection and fellowship in His sufferings, as I am conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup> if, by any means, I shall attain to the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> I do not mean that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect but eagerly strive to take hold of that for which Jesus Christ

has also taken hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Fellow-Christians, I do not think I have taken hold of it. However, I do one thing: I forget the things that are behind and strain toward the things that are ahead. <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Luke 20:9-20

<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus began to tell the people this parable: “A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it out to tenant-farmers and left home for a long time. <sup>10</sup> At the right time he sent a servant to the tenant-farmers that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. However, the tenant-farmers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> Then he sent another servant. They also beat him, treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> Then he sent a third servant. They wounded this one, too and threw him out. <sup>13</sup> Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What am I to do? I shall send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.’

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“Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy these tenant-farmers and give the vineyard to others.”

When the people heard this, they said, “May this not happen!”

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