

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today you are going to hear what seems to be a tall tale. Jesus tells the parable or story of the Vineyard. A wealthy landowner sets up a vineyard. He provides everything that is needed. He plants the vines, builds a wall and puts up a watch tower. He constructs a winepress to press grapes. This is expensive and hard work. When he is done, he rents it out to tenants. The land owner rightfully expects portions of the harvest as payment. This was a very normal arrangement in Jesus' day. Today we might say if someone puts up investment capital in a company, they expect the company to be profitable so they can receive a decent return on their investment.

Jesus is not teaching business 101. This story is about God and his people. In the past God had planted the Israelites, his people in the promised land. The security wall he provided was his Law. It also was their guide. God had given them everything they needed to produce a spiritual harvest. He wanted them to have faith and to live their faith.

Today, we would say that God has given us membership in his church, his vineyard through the preaching of the gospel. He has given us faith and the opportunity to produce fruits of faith. Our loving response to God's Word produces these fruits.

At this point this parable of Jesus seems to become a tall tale. He talks about ridiculous hatred and ridiculous love. What we hear is that the tenants weren't producing fruits. They weren't ready for the harvest day. The parable is a warning and encouragement. Jesus wants us to **BE READY FOR GOD'S HARVEST DAY!**

1. Respect his messengers

The first key to being ready for the harvest day is respecting the messengers that the landowner sends.

A. Jesus is picturing the heavenly Father graciously sending his servants, the prophets. They were to observe the harvest and help.

1. The prophets of the Old Testament help people do a self-test by preaching the law. First, they were to worship God alone and listen to his word. Were they doing what God wanted? The prophets pointed out their sinful failures. This led to the fruit of repentance. They also announced forgiveness. The

word worked faith in the forgiveness the Lord promised. This faith was a fruit that the Lord wanted to see in his vineyard. Faith led to other spiritual fruits such as loving one's neighbor.

2. The same is still going on today. God sends his messengers. Their preaching reveals our sins. Through the message the Lord calls us to repentance and forgiveness in the Savior. The message itself produces the fruits of repentance and faith. When we have faith, we will do things that believers do. This is the spiritual harvest that God is looking for.

B. Did the vineyard worker's listen?

1. The tenants showed the height of ingratitude by not listening. Instead, they beat and murdered the messengers. The Old Testament people had a long record of persecuting the prophets. Elijah was harassed and chased throughout his ministry. Jeremiah was put in a muddy well and left to die.

2. Do we listen to the messengers? We may not put pastors and those who teach to death, but we can kill the effect of their words by not listening or not putting them into practice. As Luther writes in his explanation to the 3rd Commandment, "*We should not despise preaching and the word, but gladly hear and learn it.*" God wants us to listen to the law and the gospel. The Gospel will produce the fruits of repentance and faith. Then the fruits that come from listening will naturally follow. It is the only way we can produce fruits. When a person doesn't, they are denying him the fruits that he seeks. We won't be ready for the harvest.

2. Receive his Son

In order to be ready for God's Harvest Day we must also receive his Son. This is the next key point.

A. This is a story of the ridiculous. The tenants have been ridiculous in killing the messengers. Now the owner is even more ridiculous.

1. The owner sends his son. No earthly owner would do this. He would have sent in the Marines. Why does he do this? This is a man who is full of grace. He is willing to love those who don't deserve it. He is giving them one last chance. They have one more chance to repent of their actions and produce fruits for him.

2. Since this cannot be any earthly owner, we understand this is a picture of the heavenly Father. The Israelites had killed the prophets and turned to other gods. There were ridiculously ungrateful. Although they were rebellious, God, the Father, he graciously sent his only Son. He was sent to save these

people. Today, even though most people are very rebellious, he continues to have the gospel about his Son preached. He graciously and patiently calls those who don't deserve it. God is still hoping for repentance, faith and fruits of faith.

B. The story very clearly tells us what the tenants did with the Son. They rejected him.

1. Jesus before had been speaking of the past. Now, he speaks of the future. When he talks about the tenants throwing out the son and killing him this is a direct reference to Good Friday. They would take Jesus outside of the city and have him crucified. They did this because they did not believe in him. There would be no faith from the religious leaders and their followers. This is the problem. Without faith in Jesus they could not have the spiritual fruits that the heavenly Father required. These men were unprepared for God's Harvest Day.

2. Jesus indicates that his death would not be the end. He departs from the story and he quotes Old Testament Scripture. From Psalm 118: **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.”** (V s. 22,23) This is a prophecy about Jesus resurrection and victory. They would kill him, but he would rise from the dead. He, the one they rejected, would become the cornerstone for God's kingdom. Jesus is the cornerstone, because the Bible states that whoever believes in Jesus has the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This was marvelous thing for God to do.

Application: Listening to the messengers means accepting the truth of what is being said. It is a hard truth to believe that our sins caused Jesus to be thrown out of the city and crucified. As we listen the Lord works repentance and faith. You and I believe that Jesus died for our sins. He willingly paid the price. We also believe that with him we have forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Jesus would say to you and I today, “Continue to listen, continue in your faith in me. Don’t turn your back on this wonderful salvation that I have prepared for you.” This is important as we see the end of this story.

3. Remember his judgement

This ridiculous story that Jesus is telling, has an ending. It comes in the form of a judgement day. This is a picture of the final Judgement Day that God has promised. We want to remember this.

A. Jesus doesn't actually tell the end to the story. He asks a question, "**When the owner of the vineyard comes what will he do to those tenants?**" The crowd supplies the answer.

1. The bystanders give the logical conclusion, "**The wicked tenants will come to a wicked end.**" These people, whether they believe in Jesus or not, understand what justice is. The wicked will be punished.

2. Jesus applies it to the religious leaders of his day, "**The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you.**" One of the reasons the religious leaders crucified Jesus was so they could hang on to their positions and their wealth. Jesus tells them that in the end they are going to lose this. If we reject Jesus and refuse to produce fruits of faith because we are busy seeking after other things, the things of this life, we will lose everything.

B. There is another judgement. Jesus tells us the vineyard will be given to others and they will produce fruits.

1. Again Jesus is looking into the future. He sees the Kingdom of God being given to uneducated fishermen, like Peter, Andrew, James and John. In the future Jesus also sees all kinds of people from Asia, Europe and other countries receiving the Kingdom of God.

2. We have the Kingdom when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. When we have his blessing, we produce fruits of faith. This is the good works we do. We continue listening to God's word. Also, we spread the good news of salvation so that other people believe and are saved. These are the fruits that God, the landowner, wants. This gives him great joy.

"Conclusion: You have heard a story this morning that is ridiculous. No one would normally be so gracious. Never-the-less it is a true story. It is the story of Israel and the world from God's perspective. We have ridiculously rejected the Father's gracious love. By sinning and rebelling against him. He was ridiculously gracious and sent his Son to save us. Some people refuse to believe this story, but God has given you faith. By believing in Jesus we have already the most important fruit. We didn't even produce it, God gave it to us. Faith is what makes us ready for the Harvest Day or Judgement Day. Confident in this continue serving the Lord until his return. Amen.