

A Pentecost 20 2017  
Week one of stewardship  
Matthew 21:33-46

God must love vineyards.

- They appear over a hundred times in the Bible.
- Psalm 80 refers to the Promised Land as a vineyard. Vs. 8&9 reads *Lord, you brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it and it took root and filled the land.*
- The first thing Noah did after he got off the ark was to plant a vineyard.
- Three of Jesus' parables were set in a vineyard
- Wine is mentioned 240 times.
- Jesus first miracle was to change water into wine
- And at the Last Supper he lifted a cup of wine and said "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people, do this in remembrance of me."

Sometimes we say that a parable is a small story with a large point.

In this parable, a land owner builds a nice vineyard and provides everything that is needed for a fruitful harvest. This vineyard could represent Israel, the church, or the whole creation but it definitely belongs to the owner. And it is pretty clear that the landowner is God.

The servants sent by the owner may be the prophets, messengers of God who have not been received well or they could be the church under persecution. The Son of course is Jesus, God's son.

And who are we? Most likely we are the tenants or the workers in the vineyard that belongs to someone else. We cannot claim the vineyard of God's creation as our own. Everything we have is ultimately on loan from God: our families, our possessions, our educations, even the air we breathe.

**All of it is a gift from the creator to the created.**

So we are the tenants, the renters, the temporary occupants, the hired hands or, and here is the magic word...we are the stewards. Yes this is a stewardship story.

Jesus is speaking to a people who claimed to be faithful to God but who were not bearing the fruit of faithfulness. They were not living lives that reflected God's love and faithfulness to God's whole creation and not spreading the kingdom. There had been many warnings throughout history—the kings, judges, and prophets.

Now, Jesus, as the Landlord's son, issues the same warning. **Honor the landowner by being faithful workers in the vineyard.**

In God's kingdom we are all workers in the vineyard. The Biblical word for a worker in the vineyard is "steward."

We are **stewards of everything** we have and enjoy, **and owners of nothing.**

**And** we are stewards of the gospel, (i.e.) the good news of God's love, for all, in Jesus Christ.

This understanding of stewardship fits nicely with our stewardship theme: **Live Generously**, and especially with this week's emphasis that **Generosity is both a virtue and a practice** expressed in giving and volunteering, in hospitality to others, and in acts of caring and compassion.

Last week we celebrated Mission weekend. In worship, we heard about our congregation's "**stewardship**" in Guatemala and Mississippi **By** serving others, caring for the poor and making positive friendships with those in need **and by helping to build or rebuild homes**, these mission trippers were **stewards** in the kingdom. They were **not only** sharing their wealth and their time and labor, but they were **also** sharing the gospel.

Ask anyone who has been on the receiving end of Christian kindness or ask anyone who has shared God's wealth with other and they will tell you that **there is joy in being a steward** in God's vineyard.

**Now that is where I would have liked to end my sermon** this weekend, but the events of Las Vegas weigh heavily on my mind. The truth is that even if God is the loving owner, sometimes, as in today's parable, **things can still go very wrong in the vineyard.**

The words from Isaiah ring true: *The vineyard is the Lord's and we are his pleasant planting; God expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry.* (Is 5:7)

Again, we are a nation and a people in deep grief. Not only because of the most recent events but because we have been assaulted by news of one un-natural crisis after another. Some of us feel numb, some angry, some helpless; all of that

is grief. The good news, I suppose is that even this recent madness could not dampen the tenacity of the human spirit as so many risked their lives to save others. For their sacrifice and for the compassion of so many others, we give thanks.

As Christians our discourse will be different than the secular world's.

We are rooted in God's promises and in the knowledge that there is no pain or sorrow that is beyond God's comfort or even redemption.

Where the world fears, people of faith are called to courage. Where the world despairs, people of faith are called to hope. Where the world blames, people of faith forgive. When the world gives up, people of faith work for change.

So what are we to do? How are we to respond?

Here are some thoughts based on a reflection by Tim Merrill following the shooting at new: (These are based on some comments by Timothy Merrill after an earlier shooting I've made changes and added last 2)

**TAKE ACTION** Where you live and work or go to school. Christians are people who are called to promote peace and justice and advocate for change where needed. So if you can help educational and government and institutional agencies do a better job do it. If you can use your voice to help soften the rhetoric and encourage civil discourse, do it. The Bible says: "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isaiah 1:17).

## **TAKE NO ACTION**

That is, take no violent action yourself. Embrace peace as a life-style choice. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, urges, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all (12:18)."

## **THINK FOR YOURSELF**

Resist the temptation to mimic the anger and violence around us. Think for yourself, read for yourself, analyze for yourself. Again, Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2). Notice Christians are not only those who have been transformed, but who are transformative, i.e. encouraging others to change.

## **LOVE AS CHRIST LOVED**

The Bible again and again calls us to express agape love. The Biblical texts are clear about not only loving ourselves, loving our neighbor, but loving our enemies. Therefore, agape makes no distinction between friend and enemy; it is directed toward both."

I would add two more:

## **MOST IMPORTANTLY PRAY**

Prayer is where we begin. We pray for all involved: for the family and friends of those who died, those who were injured and those who are traumatized. The prayers of the church cast a wide net—consider our need for peace and justice as we pray them today.

## **FINALLY, BE NOT AFRAID**

Can we remove all hate and violence from this world? No.  
Will we fail at times? Yes.

The Peaceable Kingdom is part of the future Kingdom of God that only God will usher in.

But we can make a difference in small ways that can have a huge impact in the world.

When our courage fails, Christ's promise is always that we need not be afraid.

Remember God is still the generous owner of the vineyard. God will continue to bless the harvest.

So when things go terribly wrong in the vineyard, we need not be afraid.

This is the good news of the Gospel.