

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, October 8, 2023.

Parable of the Wicked Tenants based on Matthew 21:33-46

I experienced the joy of delivering boxes of quilts, school kits, health kits and baby kits to the ingathering at First English Lutheran on Ballard Road in Appleton. I was greeted by enthusiastic volunteers made up of confirmation students, parents, and boy scouts, who were loading a semi-trailer. I could feel the love of God as I pulled up.

But on the other hand, in watching the news yesterday, my heart broke with the Hamas attack on Israel. I visited the Gaza strip in 2000 and know the struggle of the Palestinians who deal with checkpoints, limited fresh water, walls and fences, and Israeli settlements taking their land. But no way should it lead to violence against innocent Israeli's. We will pray for peace and an end to the cycle of violence.

So where do you go from there. For my sermon my title is...

"Sometimes we get confused between ownership and stewardship."

Jesus teaches in the sermon on the mount, "Where your treasure is, your heart will be also." We often get this backwards. We think when my heart is right, I will give my time, money, and talents to God. But Jesus is saying "No," where you put your treasure, there your heart will end up. When you serve, when you give, when you care for the most vulnerable, there your heart will be.

Many think that stewardship is giving 10%, a tithe, to God.

Stewardship is 100%. God wants it all.

Deuteronomy 18:12ff. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied... Do not say to yourself, "My power and might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is God who gives you the power to get wealth."

In our Gospel for today there was a landowner who owned a vineyard he lovingly planted. He leased it to some tenant farmers and he went away to a foreign country. He was an absentee landowner. As part of

the leasing agreement, the tenant farmers, who the landowner entrusted with his property, were supposed to give a large portion of the harvest to the landowner. So, the landowner sent his slaves to collect the annual harvest.

Instead of fulfilling their end of the bargain, the tenant farmers hatched a plan to kill the slaves who came to collect the crops. This happened 3 times. So, the 4<sup>th</sup> time, the landowner, who must have been very patient or a little naive, thought, “I will send my son, they will surely listen to him.” Well, they killed him too, thinking they could inherit the vineyard. Sound familiar? Jesus on the cross.

We know Jesus is addressing religious leaders of Judaism, who will soon have him killed. They rejected God’s messengers, the prophets, like John the Baptist. They weren’t bearing good fruit of the kingdom.

But in the parable, God didn’t give up on the vineyard. God handed it over to new tenants to keep it and steward it in order that it bear good fruit. Those new tenants is the Christian church and God’s vineyard is the whole world.

Somewhere along the way, the tenants have forgotten that they own nothing. They are just called to be stewards. Everything belongs to the landowner. Their job was caring, tending, safeguarding, cultivating, and protecting the land.

Debi Thomas of Journey with Jesus asks the question, “Have we not, like the tenants in the parable, deluded ourselves into thinking that we “own” the earth and all that is in it, when in fact, we are meant to be stewards only? I feel like our congress... our elected stewards of our nation called have confused loyalty to their party or caucus with loyalty to those whom they are called to serve.

How can we develop a sense that we are just passing through? That everything we have is a gift? What prophetic voices are we rejecting that are telling us to change our ways from a sense ownership to stewardship?

God did send his Son into the world because God so loved the world. Every part of God’s vineyard is precious. You are precious. May the

church be a good tenants of the Gospel, of our gifts, and of the earth.  
May we be the voices that lead with God's kingdom in mind. May we  
produce good fruit that is grounded in God's love and patience for us.

Amen!