

## Sermon 4 October 2020, 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Reverend Irene

Matthew 21: 33-43

Today's gospel follows on from last week when Jesus responded to the chief priests and elders of Israel who quizzed him on whose authority he did the things he did. Jesus used that passage to explain that the kingdom of God belonged to those who obeyed the word of the Lord from their hearts and acted upon it, and not for those who nodded in agreement and carried on with their own lives regardless. Today, Jesus' teaching becomes more pointed as we move towards the Passion and his death, and he warns of an even greater danger to those who do not listen to his Word. Even though the Chief Priests and Pharisees knew Jesus was aiming his message at them, they weren't interested in listening to him or concerned about pleasing God. Their response was to look for ways to trap Jesus and have him arrested for blasphemy to get him out of the way; the fly in the ointment was that the crowds who supported Jesus would react against them.

The parable of the vineyard is yet another story with a hidden meaning.

The beaten slaves represent the rejection of the prophets, the vineyard represents Israel, the killed Son and heir is Jesus and of course the owner of the vineyard is God. The transfer of the vineyard to other tenants is the portrayal of God's kingdom passing from the Jews to the Gentiles.

Jesus here predicts his own death at the hands of the Israelites, and renders His judgment on their motives. They had forsaken the will of the Lord and ruled in a worldly fashion, taking no interest in the spiritual welfare of the people. God gave the Israelites the land for them to become priests to the world, teaching and converting other nations through their example of goodness and fidelity. But, in the language of the vineyard, they had kept the produce to themselves instead of sharing it with others, thereby refusing to act as good tenants and stewards.

In our first reading, Isaiah gives a similar warning to Israel. He sings "the song of my friend," likening Israel to the vineyard of the Lord and the people as his cherished plants; the landowner did all he could to produce the best possible harvest of fine grapes (Isaiah 5:1-7): but despite this the land produced nothing but wild grapes, unfit for consumption. Isaiah declared that "my friend" will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it."

Isaiah's warning came to highlight the danger of Israel relying on pagan nations rather than God for its security. Their betrayal of the Lord in search of self-gratification would lead to the destruction of Israel on more than one occasion. Today's reading from Matthew, sees Jesus predict an even more fundamental consequence for Israel — the end of its favoured position with the Lord and the land given to other tenants — the Gentiles, who will produce God's fruit for God rather than their own fruit for themselves.

It's not just Israel that gets judged in this parable. We should recognize that we are *all* tenants in God's creation. Nothing in this life belongs to us, we are stewards with different talents, and resources, gifts from God given to increase his kingdom in the world

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through our ethical and moral conduct, by building communities that reflect His values, rather than our own desires and amusements. And by applying ourselves to spreading the Good News of Christ in the world we live in.

*The Gospel concludes with its most important message that Jesus is the cornerstone of God's work, his role is pivotal in showing us the way to live, and to have an encounter with him is to face the truth that all life's rights and wrongs are at stake, and dependant on our actions. How much better the world would be if we all saw ourselves as tenants, ready to share what we produce with those who need it. Amen*