

SERMON SUN. APRIL 3 2022

Lent 5C Luke 20:9-20 “The Son 4U.”

Dear fellow redeemed, of, by and for Christ, what did you think of the parable I read a few minutes ago?

Is it a parable of the Law and judgment, to show us our sin? Or is it a parable to teach us about our Father’s relentless mercy and love?

Really, *it’s both*, but as with the parable of the prodigal son last week, the mercy and agape love of our heavenly Father is the main point.

God won’t easily give up on us; He is passionate about saving us at all costs. We can never hear that enough, especially living in amid a fallen world.

We live in a dog-eat-dog world that will use you, chew you up and spit you out and not think twice about it.

How utterly different is God’s love. It’s a love that . . . well, would do the types of things we heard about in the parable today.

A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.

The people of Jesus’ day would have been familiar with that sort of arrangement. Many of the people were tenant farmers, working the land of another who lived far away.

In this case, the owner would have done most of the work: He prepared the land, planted the grapes, and basically did everything needed to *virtually guarantee* a harvest.

The tenants had only to tend the plants, harvest the fruits, and pay the owner his agreed upon share. It was, by all accounts, a simple enough arrangement. ***Except something went horribly wrong.***

The tenants staged a revolt. When harvest time came, the owner’s servants, one after the other, were sent back empty-handed and beaten.

The *average* landlord would have flown into a rage, evicted those tenants, and taken legal action - *but not this one*. God, the landlord, goes one step further, hoping to receive a harvest, hoping that the wicked tenants will turn from their evil ways.

He says, **“What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.”**

That doesn’t make sense, does it? What kind of father would send his beloved son to a bunch of people who have already mistreated several of his servants?

Apparently, when the tenants saw the son, they assumed the owner was dead. And so, they thought, **“This is the heir. Let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.”**

That sounds almost as crazy as the Father thinking they’d respect His Son, but is actually quite possible. For if the owner of the land died and left no heirs, the tenants could legally claim the land, and get it free and clear.

So, they take the son off the property (so they’ll at least have a degree of deniability and look innocent) and kill him.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?

He will then execute his judgment. For, you see, the son is the last word from the vineyard owner. Everything is riding on him. Reject the son, and there is nothing left but judgment.

And so, in the end, the tenants were not condemned because they were worse than any other tenants.

No, they were condemned because they rejected the owner's son. If you reject the son, you reject the owner's love.

Which, sadly, the scribes and chief priests do **at that very hour**, seeking to lay hands on Jesus and get rid of Him.

What about you? That is an important question to ask yourself. ***Where are you in this story?***

Well, if God is the landlord and the folks he sent were the prophets and Jesus is the Son, there's really only one place we can be, and it's not a very comfortable place: we are the tenants who want to be the owners.

It is the character of our sinful nature to be like these tenants; to not be satisfied with some - to always want more; to want it all.

From Adam and Eve, who were not satisfied with ***all but one tree*** in the Garden, to you and I today, the story is the same.

We want to be the owner, not the tenants. Consider the attitudes in our world today, and you tell me: who is the owner?

It's my money, and I can spend it as I please.

It's my body, and I can do what I want with it.

It's my time, and I can use it however I wish.

It's my life, and I don't need God or the church or anyone to tell me how to live it.

You can't seriously ask me to acknowledge God as the owner and all that I have and all this is on loan to me, can you? God wants a share of all this? I don't think so!

No, the world and our sinful nature reject God's authority and fail to see Him as the source of all our blessings, so it's not surprising that we and they, by nature, reject the Son. **PAUSE**

Friends, consider how generous God has been with you! How little He has asked for in return.

Now consider: who are the servants God has sent *to you* to collect His harvest of faith, love and good works?

Who needs your time? Who needs your help? Who needs your care? Who needs your compassion, a listening ear, or a sympathetic heart?

Yet have you sent them away empty handed? Have you turned a cold shoulder or a deaf ear? Have you killed them with your words, anger, or your refusal to help?

It's easy to condemn those wicked tenants, isn't it? After all ***we'd*** never do that to the son, right? We're Christians! We believe in Jesus! We would never . . . But Jesus said: ***whatever you didn't do for the least of these, you didn't do it to me.*** Oh my.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others. It's what we deserve, isn't it? And if Jesus had ended His teaching there, what would we do?

But the parable does not end there, for Jesus has not come to leave us in our sins, but to save us from them.

But in order to save us, He must first break us. Break us of our pride, of our delusion of ownership, of our self-centeredness, of our cold, hard hearts.

When we poor, miserable, sinner-tenants come up against the Son, there are only two outcomes:

[Jesus said:] **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”** That's a fact. That part's not open to discussion. But now what?

Well, what will it be? [#1] **Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces,** [or #2] **when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”**

Now, *neither one of those sounds like a very good option!*

Unless you understand that it is good to be broken by Jesus. For God breaks in order to heal. He breaks us now so that we will not be crushed and condemned in the end.

He breaks us so that we will repent and find *in Him* - and not in our sin - what we have been looking for all along.

For Jesus has promised us in His Word: **“A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”**

In other words, when the Law shows us our sin, and in our brokenness the Spirit leads us to repent, our Lord will not turn us away.

No, our God, who is patient and long suffering, relentless in His mercy, and passionate in His will to save us, makes us whole again. And He speaks to us, time and time again, those words we can never hear enough: ***I forgive you all your sins.***

How can He do that? Well, that is the **“new thing”** of which Isaiah spoke - the thing that nobody could have imagined: that God would use the death of His beloved Son at the hands of wicked tenants to give life to the world, that *all* - even wicked tenants - **who believe in Him not perish, but have eternal life.**

For God is not wringing His hands in heaven and mourning the death of His Son. No! This was His plan all along; to use sin to destroy sin.

To send His Son to death to break the power and grip of death.

To execute His judgment against sin on Jesus, that it might not be executed on you.

For our patient, longsuffering, relentlessly merciful, and passionately saving God **desires not one sinner to be lost, but that all turn to Him and live.**

He desires that our lives be built on the cornerstone of what Jesus Christ has done for us, offering His forgiveness and life.

And of that, you can be sure because you'll hear those very words in just a moment. What words? **For you.**

The body of Christ the Son, given **for you.** The blood of Christ the Son, shed **for you.**

For you, because Jesus came for you. To take your judgment, the judgment against sinners, and give you His life, the life of God. That you may live and not die. That God may do a new thing not only in the world, but *in you*.

And when you eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus, that new thing is working in you. Forgiving you, raising you, changing you. That He lives in you and you in Him, producing the fruits of faith by life in Christ.

And thus, in Christ, you need not fear the judgment of God - now, or in the end. For **It is finished**. It is finished in Christ.

When you look to the cross, do not feel guilty but loved.

For that is the message of the cross and the message that we just sang about: that you are loved with a love greater than you can know. A love that makes all things - even you and me - new.

So come - come and fall on your Savior with all the brokenness of your life, and He who was broken for you will raise you up and give you a better life now and eternal life in the future. In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.