

Order of Worship for October 8, 2023

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

Opening Hymn: “*Rejoice, O Pilgrim Throng*” – Hymn 813

Old Testament Reading – Isaiah 5:1–7

Let Me sing for My beloved My love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting; and He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Confessing our sins and receiving God’s forgiveness

P: Christ Jesus, we are the work of Your hands.

C: **We are the vineyard which You planted. You dug and cleared the land of stones. You built a tower to protect it, and planted it with choice vines.**

P: Yet, what do You often see?

C: **Wild grapes instead of good fruit. You look for justice among us and instead see bloodshed, for righteousness, and instead an outcry.**

P: We bicker and complain in the midst of our luxuries, we take for granted what we have.

C: **We fail to love one another as You have loved us.**

P: We deserve to have You do what You did to Israel.

C: **“I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.”**

P: Lord, You gave up Your life on the cross so we can be forgiven and turn to follow, not reject, You.

C: Lord, have mercy on us.

P: In the Name and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Entrance Psalm

P: Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;

C: for His steadfast love endures forever!

P: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

C: This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

P: This is the day that the LORD has made;

C: let us rejoice and be glad in it.

ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;

C: for His steadfast love endures forever!

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Let us pray...Gracious God, You gave Your Son into the hands of sinful men who killed Him. Forgive us when we reject Your unfailing love, and grant us the fullness of Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Hymn: "Fruitful Trees, the Spirit's Sowing" – Hymn #691

Holy Gospel – Matthew 21:33–46

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the twenty-first chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to Him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of

God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, because they held Him to be a prophet.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: **Praise to You, O Christ.**

Preschool-1st Grade Song: *“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”*
“My God is so Great, My God is so Mighty”

Children’s message (8:30)

Sermon Hymn: *“Christ, the Word of God Incarnate”* - **Hymn #540**

Sermon: *“God’s Vineyard”*

As we get closer and closer to the Iowa Caucuses, we start hearing more and more soundbites from candidates trying to get us to vote for them, or trying to get us to not vote for their opponents. Even just trying to watch the Iowa State football game, many of the commercials are from candidates or their PACs.

Of course, the goal is to get a positive soundbite to stick in people’s minds, but sometimes it’s the negative soundbites that stick better. A little over 10 years ago, when President Obama was campaigning for a second term, he talked about the role of government in helping business. “Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you’ve got a business, you didn’t build that.” Suddenly, that phrase, you didn’t build that, became the focus of attack ads.

In today’s lessons, we hear God telling the Israelites and the Jews that “You didn’t build that.” God sings of how much he has done for the vineyard, how he built it up. Yet the people started thinking the land is theirs to do with as they wish, instead of remembering they’re tenants on God’s land.

So God warns that he will start again. The warning comes through Isaiah, but not only Isaiah. Other prophets, other servants of God are sent again and again to call the people of Israel, the tenants of God’s vineyard, to account. And time and time again, the prophets are mistreated, persecuted, punished, and even killed.

The warnings would finally come true after Isaiah’s time, when the Israelites would be taken into exile. Their vineyards would be destroyed by the Babylonian army. The people would be mistreated, punished, even killed, and the survivors taken to Babylon. Even God’s temple, the symbol of God’s presence with them, would be destroyed.

Jesus draws on that when he tells the parable of the tenants in the vineyard. The Pharisees would especially have known scripture well enough to know Isaiah’s song of the vineyard. They knew the words of the prophets. Yet they thought they’d heard them. They thought their rules

and regulations would keep them from breaking God's laws and facing God's wrath again. They thought they were bearing the fruit of righteousness God desired for them.

Instead, they were bearing bad fruit. They'd started to think they were in control, and weren't merely tenants. They were ignoring God's commands just as their ancestors had. And they reacted to prophets like John the Baptist and teachers like Jesus in the same way their ancestors did. And so Jesus, like prophets before him, tries to get their attention through a story.

The story begins with a wealthy householder who carefully plants a vineyard—a place for growing grapes and producing wine on his property. A landowner has planted a vineyard that is fully equipped for wine production. He leases it to a group of tenants and departs for another country. They didn't build it – they just get to work it, in exchange for a share of the harvest and the profits.

The imagery in this parable immediately evokes the theme of God's people as the stewards of a garden. The book of Genesis opens with God putting humanity in a garden to "till it and keep it." God had originally intended for women and men to serve as his stewards over all creation. Later on in the Old Testament, God describes his people Israel as an unfruitful vineyard. In other words, Jesus' hearers would have recognized that Jesus' parable in Matthew 21 was not some hypothetical story but one directed at them.

More than that, from our Old Testament lesson (Isaiah 5:1-7) we discover that God is the master of the house and the owner of the vineyard. And God's people, the nation of Israel, is the vineyard. Who, then, are the tenants—the workers of the vineyard? They are the nation's leaders, the people entrusted with the cultivation and care of the vineyard while the master is away. As tenant farmers, they were responsible to grow and harvest the grapes, press the wine, and pay a portion of the net harvest to the master.

Then we get to the challenging part. "While the landlord was away," said Jesus, "the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another." Then the owner sent his own son, but the tenants "seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him."

Jesus then asked the chief priests and the Pharisees what they thought the owner of the vineyard would do to those wicked tenants. "He will put those wretches to a miserable death," they responded, "and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." Jesus gave them a nod and let them know that the story was a judgment on them. Therefore I tell you," said Jesus, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

A sense of propriety over a space is one of the problems in the parable. The tenants felt a degree of ownership of and entitlement to the vineyard and its produce that was not true of their lease agreement. You didn't build this, you don't own this, Jesus was telling the audience, especially the chief priests and Pharisees. Everything you have, everything you are, is a gift from God for you to tend accordingly.

No, what has happened here is that those responsible for overseeing the production and distribution of the fruit have, deliberately and maliciously, taken over the vineyard and its

produce for themselves. They are assuming complete and total ownership of the fruit and its distribution solely for themselves, with no thought whatsoever for the needs, rights and wishes of the landowner. They are driving out the landowner and his proxies. So this is where we must look for our parallels today, and not simply to shortcomings, weaknesses or neglect. This is about something even more basic: It is about giving the fruit to the landowner at harvest time and not keeping it for oneself.

When the Pharisees see the tenants are in the wrong, they see Jesus is preaching against them. The Pharisees hear Jesus saying God is threatening to start from scratch again. That threatens them and their way of life. Instead of repenting, instead of turning back to God, they start to do what the wicked tenants did. They start plotting to kill God's Son. They plot to kill Jesus. Jesus, the Son of a God who can sometimes seem like an absentee landlord, would be killed by the Pharisees soon after he tells this parable. He'd be killed by the very Pharisees who recognized themselves as the tenants in Jesus' parable. And like the tenants in the parable, they would be punished, as the Romans destroyed the vineyards of Judah, along with Jerusalem and the temple Jesus stands by.

But the greatest punishment of all would go on Jesus. All of the punishment all of the sin and rebellion of the people of Israel deserved, all of the punishment all of the sin and rebellion of the Pharisees deserved, all of the punishment all of our sin and rebellion deserves was on Jesus on the cross. Through that, God's vineyard was restored. Through Jesus taking on our punishment, we are forgiven and freed to bear fruit for God.

We didn't make the world. We didn't build all that we've been given. And far too often we try to take credit, and not give God His due. That sin deserves God's punishment. But while we could focus on God's wrath in these lessons, we need to instead focus on God's mercy. The mercy that made something out of nothing in the first place, and graciously gives it to us. The mercy that kept sending prophets to call the people to repentance. The mercy that sent Jesus into the world. The mercy that sent Jesus to the cross. The mercy that expanded the kingdom of God to all people. The mercy that restores and re-creates the world. We didn't make God's mercy, but we receive it because of what Jesus did for us. What a wonderful promise.

Confession of Faith: The Second Article of the Creed p. 322

Responsive prayer on Jesus' vineyard:

P: Lord Jesus, You fulfilled Your promise to us by freeing us from the power of sin.

C: "I will come and take you to a land like your own—a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Choose life and not death!" 2 Kings 18:32

P: Lord Jesus, You have given us so much. Above all You gave Your own life for us. Yet, we daily turn against You in our sin.

C: "I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against Me into a corrupt, wild vine?" (Jeremiah 2:21)

P: You gave us our families and friends to show Your love through our love.

But instead

C: “Many shepherds ruined My vineyard and trampled down My field; they turned pleasant field into a desolate wasteland.” (Jeremiah 12:10)

P: Yet You came into this world to be this:

C: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Psalm 118:22)

P: You were rejected so that we could be Your new vineyard. Help us to remember Your words spoken on the night before You died:

C: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He pruned so that it will be even more fruitful.

P: You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

C: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

P: If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

C: This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.” (John 15:1-8)

(Other concerns . . .)

P: Help us to hold to Your promise.

C: “For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.’” (Jeremiah 32:15)

P: Until then, send Your Holy Spirit into us that we bear the fruits of Your love to us:

C: “They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest.” (Psalm 107:32)

8:30 AM service continues

Lord’s Prayer

Stewardship Message

Sharing Our Ministry

Hymn: *“O Blessed, Holy Trinity”* - Hymn #876

Closing prayer:

P: Our Lord Jesus Christ, You have endured the doubts and foolish questions of every generation. Forgive us for trying to be judge over You and grant us the confident faith to acknowledge You as Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing (pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“The Wonderful Cross”* (on screen)

Postlude

11:00 AM service continues

Stewardship Message

Sharing Our Ministry

Offering:

Hymn: *“Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful, Lord”* – Hymn #955

Invitation to Communion:

P: Christ Jesus invites us to come to the special supper He has prepared for us by His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection on Easter. He calls us to receive in, with, and under the bread and wine His true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. We prepare to participate in this meal.

The Words of Our Lord

Lord’s Prayer

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution

Communion Hymns: *“My Song Is Love Unknown”* – Hymn #430

“Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart” - Hymn #806

Dismissal

Prayer after communion:

P: Our Lord Jesus Christ, You have endured the doubts and foolish questions of every generation. Forgive us for trying to be judge over You and grant us the confident faith to acknowledge You as Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing (Pastor)

C:Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“The Wonderful Cross”* (on screen)

Postlude