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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 22, 2017
20th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 5:1-7, Philippians 3:12-21
Hymns: 234; 404; 408; 413:5-6 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 21:33-43

“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. ³⁴ Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. ³⁵ And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. ³⁷ Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and cast *him* out of the vineyard and killed *him*.

⁴⁰ “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”

⁴¹ They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone.

This was the Lord’s doing,

And it is marvelous in our eyes’?

⁴³ “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Knowing your place.

“You forget yourself!” That isn’t a compliment. It is spoken to remind someone that they are not on the same level as the individual they are addressing. They have forgotten that they are subservient to the person they are addressing, and the manner in which they are speaking or the criticism they are making is out of line. Of course it can happen in other ways as well. Employees may begin to feel that they are more important to a company’s success than is being recognized or rewarded by their employers, and the employees begin to pilfer some of the products or supplies at the company, or perhaps some write critical notes about the boss on social media. In any case, it happens, people forget their position in life.

It has likely happened with some of us, indeed I’m pretty sure that it has happened with **all** of us in our relationship with the Lord that we forgot exactly how humble a position we hold before Him and chose to disobey what He commands, or question His wisdom or verity in some issue in our lives. This makes it necessary for us to be reminded, or be “put in our place.”

So it was in Jesus’ parable that is the basis of our meditation this morning. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will graciously lead us to --

THEME: Knowing Our Place in the Kingdom of God.

We are in the position of being --

I. Tenants, not Owners.

Jesus' opening for this parable focuses on all the work the landowner did to make the vineyard a reality. The vineyard didn't just appear on its own.

Matthew 21:33 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

The landowner planted the vineyard, and then set a hedge around it to protect the tender plants from the harsh elements. He dug a winepress so that everything would be ready for a receiving the harvest, and he built the tower to watch over the vineyard. These are things that the landowner accomplished in making a vineyard, **his** vineyard. It was then that in the parable he set out on the journey; in his wisdom he leased the vineyard to vinedressers who would care for his vineyard and also profit from the landowner's investment of labor and money during his absence.

Now this is a parable, so of course if we are going to learn from Jesus' parable we need to understand what it is about, and who is represented by the different elements in the parable. It is evident that the vineyard itself is the kingdom of God. Jesus states plainly enough that this is a lesson about the kingdom of God in His closing statement. So the builder and owner of the vineyard is God. The Lord planted this vineyard as He called His people, and at the time of the parable that was primarily the people of Israel, the Jewish nation. The tenant farmers would be the chief priests and scribes and Pharisees who were the spiritual leaders of the people. Immediately following our text Matthew reports that they perceived that this parable was directed at them.

What went on that Jesus directed this parable against them? The abuses Jesus describes in the parable began long before Jesus was born. The leaders of the people of Israel failed in their duty. When the Lord sent His messengers the prophets, the priests and rulers of the people refused to listen to them. They did not encourage the people to repent. Some of the Lord's servants were tormented and persecuted, others were killed; just like the messengers in the parable. The leaders of the people had forgotten that they were servants of God. They didn't know their place before the Lord.

So it was also at the time when the landowner sent his son; when God sent His only begotten Son into the world. That should have been enough to remind the leaders of the people of their place before the Lord. The signs and wonders, the teaching of the Lord Jesus, the fulfillment of the words of the prophets, it was all there, and it was not a failure to recognize the Lord. They knew who Jesus was! It was a failure to know their place before the Lord, and be submissive. Instead the chief priests had, already at the time of the presentation of this parable, conspired to kill Jesus at a convenient time, when it wouldn't cause an uproar among the people. They looked upon the Lord's vineyard, **God's** kingdom on earth, as **their** domain, and they were jealous of it, and were not willing to give it up. They forgot themselves, and who they were.

This is something that has been repeated again and again in the centuries since that time. The Lord still sets "tenants" in place to work in His vineyard, in His Kingdom. But the Lord is still the Landowner. It is our place to "*Serve the Lord with gladness ... Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*" (Psalm 100:2,3).

As we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation we recall the abuses of power within the Roman Church that Luther and other devout men opposed. Powerful leaders within the Roman Church forgot themselves. But that still goes on today in many different denominations. Theologians see themselves as being wiser than God, and they see the church as their domain to order and run as they like according to their ideas for what is right in the world.

It is only human nature. Because of that we need to understand that we are not immune to the same forgetfulness of our place before the Lord. We also may forget that we are but tenants who labor in the vineyard of the Lord, and He will hold us accountable. In the parable we are brought to a proper understanding and acceptance of the truth concerning Jesus, --

II. . Recognizing Jesus' as the Heir of God's Kingdom.

Yes, Jesus made it quite clear that the conspiracy of the Chief Priests, and Scribes and Pharisees, who made up the membership of the High Council, was no secret from Him. He knew of their plans. He even knew that Judas was about to play into their hands and would betray Jesus for money (Jesus even knew the amount from the Old Testament prophecy). They looked at Jesus as their rival, not their Lord, not the Messiah, certainly not their Redeemer. They saw no need of a Redeemer. They were only concerned about losing their place, their position of power and influence in society. And so they rejected Jesus, and just three days after Jesus taught this parable they would pressure Pilate into crucifying Jesus. But that wouldn't fulfill their objective, not in the least.

And so in presenting the truth of the parable Jesus asks His audience for a proper conclusion. What should happen to these unfaithful tenants? And their answer was clear: *"They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.'"* (Matthew 23:41)

Matthew 23:42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

'The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the Lord's doing,
And it is marvelous in our eyes'?

Jesus directed them to the prophecy of Psalm 118, a prophecy in the midst of fulfillment with their rejection of Jesus, with their plot to put Him to death. The prophecy, if they would but hear the Scriptures, made it clear that this would not thwart God's plan, indeed the Lord would still exalt His Son to be the Chief Cornerstone, the very foundation stone of His Church. Yes, Jesus died, and in that the chief priests were successful, but the grave could not hold Him. Death would be defeated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! In Jesus' resurrection it became clear that God had exalted His Son. This was the Lord's doing as God our Savior fulfilled all that was necessary for our eternal salvation. It is indeed marvelous in our eyes.

It is this truth taking hold of our hearts that teaches us our place in God's Kingdom. It is a place of marvelous grace and glory, for we have been received as children of God and joint heirs with Christ. We have been made God's own special people, a royal Priesthood, so that we might show forth the praises of God. You see, this includes **us** because God's grace will not be frustrated or thwarted by the stubborn unbelief of those who spurned that grace of God in Christ. Jesus reveals that --

III. The Kingdom of God Is Graciously Presented to Others.

Jesus declared a tragic judgment, one far worse than the impending destruction of Jerusalem.

Matthew 23:43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

The Kingdom of God was to be taken from the people of the Jews because of their rejection of the Jesus as Lord and Savior. As the gospel would be proclaimed in all the world so the kingdom of God would spread to the nations of the world, to peoples of different lands and tongues, to desperate sinners everywhere. Jesus sent out His apostles and all other believers to the far corners of the earth. They were to make disciples of all the nations by teaching them of Jesus and baptizing them for the washing away of their sins.

And so the Kingdom of God has come to us in our time, in our homeland, the Lord in His grace and love has established His rule in our hearts that we might know and believe that Jesus is the Christ our Savior. However, the Lord still maintains the same expectation that was there with those first tenant farmers in the parable. He looks for fruit to be delivered to Him.

We aren't here just to sit still and do nothing as the Lord lavishes us with His grace. There is no room for anyone to think, "I don't need to attend church or to participate in church because I already believe, and I know enough to get to heaven." The absurdity of that statement notwithstanding; that is not the Lord's directive for us. We are tenant farmers in the vineyard of the Lord. There is no room for being a slacker. The Lord is looking for fruit from our labors, from us, the beneficiaries of His grace and blessing. We are here on earth not to become wealthy with material treasure which

no one can take with them after this life. We are here to show forth the praises of our Saviour, to share the good news of salvation with people around us and throughout the world. It is that labor of love, love for our Savior and for the lost souls in this world that will be blessed by the Holy Spirit. And **there will be fruit. Souls will be saved.** The Lord's name **will be glorified**, and our lives will be most assuredly blessed.

Know your place. Know your purpose. Know your final destination.

We are children of God and heirs of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, our Savior, our Redeemer.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.