

Matthew 21:33 - 46
Rev Susan Pickering

Gathering of the People of God

Organ Prelude

Welcome & Notices

Centring Prayer

Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship,
let us rest in the silence, breathing in the presence of God...

Processional Hymn TiS382 Now the Green Blade Rises

Light the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a reminder that Christ is the light of the world.

Call to Worship

The heaven's are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

Let the words of our mouths
and the meditations of our hearts,
be acceptable to you.
Let us gather as community
to worship God, Creator of all that is.

Acknowledgment of Country

We recognise that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the sky, and all that is in them.

This land is Holy Ground

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As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians,
the Turrbal and Jagera people, elders, past, present and emerging
**We honour them for their custodianship of the land,
on which we gather today.**

Introit

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Confession

God of mystery
In awe and wonder we come before you
We offer songs of praise
And prayers of thanksgiving in this time of worship together
We remember how you guide your people,
And acknowledge your guiding in our lives.
We give thanks and praise
for the freedom we experience
For the love, mercy, grace and peace.

At this time we come to you,
In community we come with repentant hearts,
Desiring to turn back to you.

We confess that we come to you in our human frailty
With moments of doubt and fear.
There are times we doubt your presence
And so it is so much easier to turn and worship the idols
Of our lives and the world.

We each hold our beliefs and understandings tight,
We dare not let go, they are the cornerstone of our lives!
They are what have made us who we are,
Now is the time for us to ask - do we need to let go?

Our views and opinions are supported by evidence,
Of course they must be right, they are not judgements, just plain fact!
You get out of this world what you put in,
If you work hard you reap the rewards - right?

God forgive us,
Send your Spirit to open our eyes,
To see the injustice, the inequality in our world.

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‘designed to be plausible,’ with characters that are blameworthy and recognisable, yet there is some distance placed between them and the audience.³

The parable begins in a way that; ‘evokes the love song of the vineyard in Isaiah,’⁴ the song of unfruitfulness, hope of grapes but the yield is one of wild grapes, there’s an expectation of justice but what was seen was bloodshed, righteousness but a cry.⁵ Within this parable the listeners are drawn to allegory as a mirror is held before them.

The tenants have been entrusted with the vineyard, when the landowners slaves turn up to collect the produce, they are greeted with horrific violence. When the son turns up, they recognise him as the heir and so they kill him. It appears that their actions are calculated, in this world if the legal heir died or left the property unclaimed it opened the way for the land to be claimed by others. The tenants, in killing the son are setting themselves up to seize the property.⁶ Jesus then poses a question to the religious leaders; ‘Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’⁷ Their response; “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”⁸ The next question Jesus asks is; ‘Have you never read in the scriptures?’⁹ offering the religious leaders the interpretive lens of Psalm 118, an invitation to consider their rejection of revelation,¹⁰ concluding with a warning; ‘Therefore...the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.’¹¹ The penny drops, the mirror that was held before them holds the revelation, Jesus is talking about them.

This parable today confronts us to consider how we read and interpret parables and more broadly scripture. It was highlighted in a number of my readings that

³ Jarvis in Feasting on the Gospels

⁴Kittredge in Feasting on the Gospels

⁵Isaiah 5:1 - 7

⁶ Brown in Feasting on the Gospels

⁷ Matthew 21:40

⁸ Matthew 21:41

⁹ Matthew 21:42

¹⁰ Jarvis in Feasting on the Gospels.

¹¹ Matthew 21:43 - 44

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within today's text we can perceive the potential Christian roots of anti-semitism,¹² Brown suggesting that this 'parable has fuelled sermons that claim Israel as a whole has been rejected by God.'¹³ The other issue is the violence, this is one of those texts that could be used to justify violence - the bottom line is that if we go to the text seeking something in particular we will find it!

What we need to do is ask the questions that enables us to bring a text that is historically specific into the present 'without replication of the violent supersessionalist rhetoric and effect.'¹⁴ The immediate issue is the rejection of Jesus, the rejection of the revelation of the kingdom. The Chief Priests and elders present, on the outside, quite fine, they hold authority within the community, in their observance of the law they were viewed as righteous, people who God was obviously pleased with,¹⁵ unfortunately in many cases the law became an idol, the result being blindness to why Christ had come, their aim became oppose him and lay traps for him.¹⁶

With regards to the gospels and the scriptures in some cases the word has become an idol, that's word small w. The words are sometimes read literally, historical context forgotten or dismissed, no questions asked, no discernment applied, the scriptures then become something that we simply accept and abide to, and so they become words on a page that hold us bound and captive. What we are called to do is seek and listen for the Word, the Logos, to engage and ask the questions to enable us to implement the wisdom and the teachings in the present - this then becomes the living Word! The gospels, the life of Christ really ought to constantly challenge us, so often when those challenges come in our world and we are forced to reflect and reconsider it is much easier to stone those who challenge, metaphorically speaking, with Christian love of course.

We heard from Exodus, the 10 commandments, presented as God's own utterance, the only direct utterance - in the context of theophany. Many interpretations have taken the commandments out of their covenantal context leaving them to be seen and heard as a set of prohibitions. Repeated again in Deuteronomy, the 10 commandments were never to be read in a vacuum, but to be considered as part of the Exodus story, tracing the journey of Israel, a journey to becoming God's people, one from slavery to liberation. When read in context the

¹² Lewicki in Feasting on the Gospels, Hauerwas, Hare

¹³ Brown in Feasting on the Gospels

¹⁴ Kittredge in Feasting on the Gospels

¹⁵ Wright

¹⁶ Dykstra in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

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commandments are not simply a flat list of rules for observance but a basis upon which radical, intense ethical reflection can be enacted in the context of the ongoing covenant. They generate radical, social imagination that seeks to bring both public and private life of the people under the government of God who liberates, God who ordered heaven and earth for generative well-being! The commandments are about creating a space in which community and relationships can flourish - so for example; 'You shall not covet your neighbour's house; wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour, becomes a reminder that community cannot flourish if we desire what our neighbour has, it will breed only jealousy and contempt.

Today's parable is intended to clarify, for the chief priests and elders, Jesus' identity providing them with an opportunity to reflect on the way they've lived.¹⁷ The evocative question posed basically asks; 'If the rejected stone became the cornerstone of God's kingdom, will you be the ones crushed by the stone or the ones producing the fruits of the kingdom?'¹⁸ This parable is a call to repentance, a call to look in the mirror and seek beyond the external representation, to focus on the Imago Dei, the image of God in who we are all created. It is not our role to determine who is in and who is out,¹⁹ but we are called to recognise the Christ, the Christ who is in the homeless, the prisoner, the refugee, the addict. Very often it's easier to respond in ways that dismiss and sometimes those ways are violent, maybe it's not physical violence but intimidation, harsh words or complete dismissal of a person's humanity can be just as, if not more damaging.

We can stick to rigid doctrine deciding what is right and wrong, who is in, who is out, but the reality is we are called discipleship, to listen for the living Word, we are called into relationship with God and one another. We have to be prepared to let go, to not fear what we may lose but recognise what we will gain on the journey together. If we live lives that reflect Christ we will become a community that bears the fruits of the kingdom.

Prayer

God, may we be prepared to face the mirror that is held up to us, may we dare to repent - turn back to you - to be your people, reflecting and living the way of Christ. May your Spirit move among us, may she touch our lips to speak in ways that reflect your kingdom. Amen

¹⁷ Cho in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

¹⁸ Cho in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

¹⁹ Hauerwas

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Hymn: As a Fire is meant for Burning

Prayers for the People:

Sacrament of the Lords Supper

Peace

Communion Hymn: Eat this bread TiS verses 1,3 & 4

-Invitation

At this table we will share this meal,
the bread of life and the cup of compassion,
At this table we renew our relationship with God,
And experience the presence of Christ.
So come...

-Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

God be with you
And also with you

Lift up your hearts
We lift them to God

Let us give thanks to the God of love
It is right to give our thanks and praise

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for you have made us your own, through Christ Jesus,
and given us a new righteousness based on faith.

You created the entire universe:
the sky tells of your glory,
day and night reveal the genius of your ways.
You brought your people out of slavery
and gave them your laws and commandments,
that they might be rich in Spirit and clear in vision.

Though we repeatedly rejected your ways
and destroyed your messengers,

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you sent your Son to us to renew heaven's call.
Though the crowds recognised him as a prophet,
those who coveted his inheritance seized and killed him.
But you raised him to new life,
and now he stands as the cornerstone of righteousness.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
gladly joining our voices
To the sound of the church
On earth and in heaven with the eternal hymn:

SANCTUS - Sung

Holy, Holy Holy Lord

God of Love and Light

heaven and earth are full

Are full of your glory.

Blessed is the one who comes,

in the name of the Lord

Hosanna in the highest

Hosanna in the highest

Hosanna in the highest

-Institution/Narrative

-Invocation

Holy God

Breathe your Spirit upon us,

Upon this bread and this cup,

That they may be heaven's food and drink from you,

Renewing, sustaining and making us whole,

And that we may be your body on earth,

Loving and caring in the world.

Amen

And so as a sign of sacred unity, we join together in the prayer;

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

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For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

-Breaking the Bread

Prayer after Communion

We thank you God for this feast that we have shared
We thank you for the nourishment for the journey
May we remember your presence in this meal
As we continue our journey, as we are challenged by the call to the work of the kingdom.
Thank you that you renew our strength and guide us in all we do.
Amen

Sending Forth the People of God

Hymn: TiS687 God gives us a Future

Words of Mission & Blessing

Let us leave this place
challenged by what it means to be in relationship
with God through Christ
and with each other.
Let us work together on being community
loving the Lord our God
and each other as Christ loved.

May the blessing of God tend the gardens of our lives,
May the blessing of Christ reveal to us the way,
and may the blessing of the Holy Spirit nurture us, enabling us to produce the fruit
of the kingdom as we journey together in community.

Recession Shalom To You Now

Postlude

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Sources

NRSV Holy Bible

Preaching the Word - sojo.net

Matthew - Stanley Hauerwas

Feasting on the Gospels - Edited by Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson

Matthew for Everyone - Tom Wright