

"Grace Sends the Only Son"

Luke 20:9-20

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent + April 3, 2022

Dear Christian Friends,

Have you ever been frustrated by trying collect money that was owed you? Maybe you loaned some money to someone and they did not pay you back on time and you finally had to go to them to try to get your money. Maybe you sold something and the buyer had trouble coming up with the money that he or she promised you. Maybe you had some rental property and found it frustrating to collect the rent or anything else that you are due. Maybe you had a home somewhere that you owned and the tenants were perpetually late with their payments. Maybe when they moved out they left a big mess and a lot of damages to the property that you knew you would never collect. Or, maybe you have rented out farmland and were to receive a portion of the harvest as payment for use of the land--how frustrating if the tenant does not come through with what he has promised.

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants is about this kind of situation: the frustration of the owner over against the tenants of His vineyard. As so often in the parables of Jesus, we see every day situations, but with someone acting in a way that is very different from what is expected. Our theme is: "Grace Sends the Only Son" and we would like to finish that phrase to make three different sentences telling the truth of the parable: (1) Grace sends the Only Son to collect what is rightfully due. (2) Grace sends the Only Son knowing that the Son will be killed. (3) Grace sends the Only Son so that people would build their lives on Him.

- I -

Grace sends the only Son--to collect what is rightfully due. One commentator explains: "The setting of the parable was in keeping with the customs of the day. It was also a familiar Old Testament theme from Isaiah 5:1-7 called "The Song of the Vineyard." The owner of the vineyard planted the vines (in other words the owner did all the work) and expected to receive a profit for his efforts. The tenants did not make the vineyard. They entered into possession of it. The owner did not stand over with a whip. He went away and

left them to work in their own way. In renting to the vinekeepers he was allowing them to share in the profit of the crop. It was not expected that they would keep the entire profit" (Buls).

The owner is God, and the vineyard is His people Israel. The tenants were the leaders of Israel--many of the same people listening to Jesus on this Tuesday before His death. What is that fruit for which the Father looks? It is a faith in the Lord's promise of salvation through the Messiah and a life that gives evidence of that faith by love of God and others. Time after time God sent prophets, or spokesmen, to Israel looking for that faith. Time after time He sent His servants to preach the word and tell more of the promises in order that the Lord would draw the people to Himself in sincere faith.

How does it work today? God is still sending His word to us. Jesus, now sitting at the right hand of God, is ruling over and filling all things for the benefit of His church, again and again sending representatives to preach and teach the word of God; making it richly available to anyone who wants to listen. What is the fruit for which God is looking? It is faith in Jesus Christ--faith that genuinely trusts in Him and is seen to be real on the evidence of good works: love for God and love for others. This is not unreasonable for the Lord. This is what is due Him. These are the gifts that God in His grace has set up for us.

- II -

Grace sends the only Son--knowing that the Son will be killed.
One commentator puts it this way: "In line with the custom and culture of the setting, it was reasonable for the master to send a slave to receive the master's portion. The word 'season' does not mean the first year. The owner waited 2 or 3 years until the vineyard was established and the vines could bear. Then he sent a servant. The owner of the vineyard wanted part of the crop as his payment. The servant, however received the opposite of what he expected. Rather than getting the fruit for his master, the slave was beaten and sent away empty handed. The owner's slave[s] were abused and rejected. The wicked tenants kept everything, although they did not have the authority to do so, since they did not own the vineyard. The fact that this action was repeated several times shows the great patience of the owner as well as the wickedness of the

tenants. They treated the prophets who were sent to them by God in a most unloving and unkind way" (Buls).

For a long time the owner was patient. When the first representative did not collect any fruit, he sent another, even though the first servant was beaten by the tenants. Then He sent another, and another. Each one is treated worse than the one before. Then, surely knowing the Son will be killed, He sends Him! From a human point of view, what a foolish move! The violence against the first three servants seems to have escalated. This is not a time to send the Son! This is the time to send in the sheriff or the federal marshal or the Roman legions. This is the time when the owner has every right to use force to evict the wicked tenants and punish them for the way His servants were treated. But not this owner! He sends His one and only Son and says, "I Will send My beloved Son; perhaps they will respect Him" (v.13).

This is exactly what God has done for us! He sent His One and Only Son--the One nearest and dearest to His heart--on behalf of His people--and not just the people of Israel, but sinners from every tribe and nation. He sent Him knowing full well that He would be rejected, betrayed, arrested, unjustly condemned, whipped, mocked, crucified. He knew that His Son would have to suffer alone when by Himself He would carry out the just sentence of eternal punishment against sinners. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God did not send His Son to die for His friends, but for His enemies. God knew exactly what would happen, and yet He went through with the plan. By the resurrection of Christ we can see and know that the job was finished.

- III -

Grace sends the only Son--earnestly hoping that people will build their lives on Him. Grace sends the Only Son in earnest. This is not a minor matter, nor one of mere trivia. For the tenants of the vineyard it was a matter of life or death. They could not keep on rejecting the representatives of the owner forever.

For a long time the Lord is patient. He wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. He does not wish anyone to be lost to eternal punishment in hell. The fact that He has not yet acted against all wickedness in the world is a sign of His patience, not a sign of weakness or indifference. "The

Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). "God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

The place which Israel should have occupied is to be given to others. The others are those in the Church. "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:43). (Buls)

Saul of Tarsus was not one who built his life on Christ. His glory, his hope, the foundation on which he built his life, was entirely within himself. Reflecting back on that time of his life, we heard this morning: "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:4-6). But when the risen Christ showed Himself to Saul and called him to faith, Saul came to realize that that foundation was nothing but sinking sand. It was even worse than sinking sand, he calls it all "rubbish," literally "dung." By the power of the Holy Spirit he was brought to faith in Jesus, who also chose him to be His apostle, or spokesman, to the nations. He went to write, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish [dung, manure], in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Philippians 3:7-9). He concludes by telling the future that God has for him: "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11). The same power of God that raised Christ from the dead would be at work in those who believe. By the power of God we daily turn away from our sins and once again believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, sharing in the fruits of His death, sharing in the sufferings of Christ as the

world opposes us, but marked out by God for the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. That is life on the Rock, Jesus Christ.

God continues to send His Son through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. It is God's intention that everyone who hears the word would believe it and be saved. And, by the working of God the Holy Spirit, God does create faith among those who hear. And He does keep us in that faith. He does enable us to stand firm even when others oppose us. He will bring to completion what He has begun in us.

I'm reminded of a certain missionary to Indonesia. He followed in the footsteps of missionaries who had been killed and eaten by cannibals. The natives tried many times to kill him, but God protected Him each time. Finally, the natives relented and the chief came to faith. Large numbers followed. That was the 1800's. Today there are several million believers who trace their spiritual lineage to this work. They have built their lives on Christ the Rock, the cornerstone.

God grant that we would always do the same! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.