

10/4/26
19th Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from September 27th – October 3rd

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: Beloved God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 21:23-32) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 21:33-46

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What detail in this parable catches your attention first? Why?
2. Where does the landowner go after leasing the vineyard?
3. What do the tenants seem to believe belongs to them?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What small practice have you done (or would like to do) that has helped you listen to the voice of God in your life?
2. What is something you have a hard time letting go of?
3. When have you been surprised by where God was at work?

Memorize this verse: 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 amazing in our eyes?"' (Matthew 21:42) When and where have you been amazed recently?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 80:7-15. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

I think I know what Matthew's up to here and, quite frankly, I'm not a fan. This parable, quite similar to those in Mark and Luke, has one major difference from its sibling accounts. At the close of Mark and Luke, the audience remains the same. Matthew, however, changes it slightly. Whereas it is "chief priests and elders" at the front of the narrative, it is now "the chief priests and Pharisees" who want to arrest him. Taken together, and given that Matthew is writing about fifty years or so after the events he recounts in order to encourage his congregation, especially in the face of disputes with Pharisees, I think Matthew places such harsh words on the lips of Jesus' opponents in order to have them condemn themselves. In this way, Matthew suggests, it is not Jesus' rendering judgment; rather, they themselves witness their own heinous rejection. This is not unlike Matthew depicting the crowds before Pilate similarly condemning themselves in the harshest of terms a bit later in the story, when "the whole people" say, in response to Pilate's assertion of Jesus' innocence, "His blood be on us and our children".

Keeping in mind that Matthew's community is a distinct religious minority with little societal or religious power. They are caught up in a bitter sibling rivalry with Jewish communities, and are uncertain and likely fearful of their future after the destruction of the Temple. But two thousand years later, and with centuries of anti-Semitic use of verses like these, they are painful to read. But whatever we may think of Matthew's rhetorical decisions, perhaps we can put them to a better use than he imagined. Because here's the thing: the violent answer the audience gives Jesus is the right answer, at least according to the world. The landowner has every right to punish the tenants for their refusal to pay him his due and every right to destroy them, even put them to death, for their treatment of his servants and for their murder of his son. Yes, it is the right answer, the answer Jesus' audience expects, the answer the world demands. But in Matthew's story, it is not the answer Jesus gives. Again, Matthew likely makes this shift to criticize his opponents. Nevertheless, according to this particular part of the narrative, Jesus does not give this answer. Which prompts us to remember that the parables are pictures and insights of what the kingdom of God looks like. By throwing everyday events and people together in unexpected ways, Jesus' parables point to who God is, how God acts, and how we are expected and invited to live in light of all this. Which means that while the answer the chief priests and elders and Pharisees give is the right answer according to everything we've learned from our life in the world, it's not the answer God looks for.

In the end, this parable isn't about wicked tenants or Pharisees or Matthew's community or even us. It's rather about God. God the one who entrusted us with all good things, blessing us beyond the dreams of our grandparents. God the one who, even when disappointed by what we do with those blessings, still comes to us in love. God the one who weeps over the injustices of the world, embraces those who fall short, and promises to never, ever give up on anyone. Not those tenants. Not Matthew with his penchant for violent rhetoric. Not even us, when we refuse to recognize others as God's beloved children and instead view them as competitors or threats. Setting the parable free, for even just a moment or two, from its original context invites us to ask a more personal and pertinent question: Will we hoard our blessings or share them? Now let me be clear. I'm not saying our eternal salvation hangs in the balance in how we answer these questions. God who loves wicked tenants, Pharisees, overly zealous evangelists, and painfully comfortable Christians alike has already seen to that. We are saved by grace through faith for Christ's sake, still and always. So I'm not saying this is a matter of our souls, but rather of the quality and character of our lives as Christians. Because now that we know ourselves to be those God loves unabashedly and shamelessly, we are free to live with hope, courage, and generosity. Having been healed, we can now offer to heal others. Having been reconciled, we can be instruments of reconciliation. Having tasted the mercy of God's justice, we can risk ourselves in working for greater justice for others. And having been blessed beyond measure, we can be a blessing to those around us.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from
evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

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. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen