

Gospel lesson

We continue from where we left off last week, with Jesus dealing with the chief priests and elders in the temple during Holy Week.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-authority/>;
courtesy of Lumo Project Films - www.lumoproject.com

Matthew 21:33-46

NRSVue

³³ "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went away.

³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce.

³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they treated them in the same way.

³⁷ Then he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'

³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

⁴¹ They said to him, "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."

⁴² 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'?"

⁴³ "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits.

⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.

⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

It is World Communion Sunday. What does that mean to you? <Let them respond>

What does being united in Christ mean on a global scale? <Let them respond>

✝ With regard to the environment? <Let them respond>

✝ With regard to politics? <Let them respond>

✝ With regard to social justice? <Let them respond>

How did Word of Christ spread across the whole world?
<Let them respond>

How do you think having colonialism tied to missionaries' work affected the natives' learning about Christ? <Let them respond>

Where do you think missionary work happens today?
<Let them respond>

How might we do effective mission work in our local area and community? <Let them respond>

God calls us to serve our Lord above anyone and anything else, gives us abundant grace, and tells us to share love with others. May we always keep the wisdom and grace of God in the forefront of our dealings with one another, that we may truly be united as one in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

<Hymn "How Firm a Foundation"

UMH #529>

Message: The Heavenly Call



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/pressing-on-worship-series/week-3-nineteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-3-nineteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-pressing-on-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty Lord of all the world,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may press on as You call us, to share Your holy grace upon this Earth. Amen.

On this World Communion Sunday, we listen for "The Heavenly Call" as we continue our series "Pressing On":

"For Paul, faith is a deeply embodied journey that calls us into the present, embodied reality of loving and living with God, self, neighbor, and all creation. We press on together here and now by the grace through which Christ saves us."¹

You know I am taking classes toward getting an MDiv. For my schoolwork, I have to submit assignments. I can look at the title of an assignment and have a general idea about it, but I really have to open up the instructions in order to do what the professor wants – otherwise, I get penalized for doing the wrong thing.

Rules and laws get put in place to steer people to

¹ Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/pressing-on-worship-series/>.

what is right, otherwise they veer into what is wrong. There is no law requiring everyone to walk – though pretty much everyone has at least some time in their lives – but there **are** laws about where people may **not** walk (usually for safety reasons).

In the days of the ancient Israelites, societies were largely ruled by might: whoever was strongest and able to force others to do their will got to be in charge. True justice was hard to get.

By the time they were at Mount Sinai, the people had been shown over and over again that God is more powerful than anything humans can imagine. They were ready to listen to God's instructions.

And God directed them away from the violence and cruelty prevalent in the world toward being a community of love and caring. "You shall not" became boundaries for behavior so that they nurtured one another and built healthy relationships rather than tearing one another apart. The psalmist celebrates how wonderful the ordinances of the Lord are because they guide the people toward holiness.

Having laws does not prevent abuse of them, however. This world is full of people "working the system" for personal gain at the expense of others, yet God calls us to live in love (as we were created to do) and provides tools to help us re-focus on holy living.

The temple priests and Pharisees were supposed to help people do just that, and were given positions of honor among God's people because of their responsibility. Unfortunately, they got sidetracked into making sure rituals were performed properly without paying attention to the true needs of the people. And they grew concerned with their positions, playing politics and demanding to be in control rather than listening with humble hearts to the One whom God had identified as "Son."

Knowing trials were in store for Him later in the week, Jesus told the chief priests and Pharisees exactly what they were doing. He made it clear what path was good and what was not, and let them choose for themselves what to do. They had the chance to repent; instead, they hardened their hearts.

How often do we, striving to be in control, refuse to accept what others are telling us about the harm we are doing? Do we let God shape us or do we harden our hearts, deaf to the Heavenly Call? How often do we actually listen instead, turn to God for guidance, and humbly try to do better?

Saul was one of those who thought he knew how best to serve God, blameless under the law and persecuting the followers of Christ. After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus where he was confronted

with the error of his ways, he did something the chief priests did not do during Holy Week in Jerusalem – he repented and turned to serving God in truth rather than in form. His heart was made holy by God's grace. And so later, as Paul, he wrote to the Philippians about how the prestige and honor he had with the temple was worth losing to gain Christ.

In my class assignments, I can quote from the readings to answer the questions. However, when I realize the professor wants me to show engagement with the readings, that I wrestle in thought about the material we learn, I give much better answers and I learn much more. When we realize through Jesus that God wants us to build relationships of love, that we should wrestle to apply the laws with nurturing those relationships in mind, we live much better and become more holy. That is our heavenly call, toward which we ought to always be pressing on.

So this week:

- ✝ Seek to understand what God is calling us to do. Pray, read scripture, meditate – do whatever helps you to connect with the Lord
- ✝ Consider where we have failed or missed the mark, as individuals and as a society.
- ✝ Ask God for help in getting back on track. Let the wisdom of the omniscient Almighty guide you.
- ✝ Apply yourself to doing God's will. Strive to show

nurturing love that enables others to choose for themselves with clarity about what is good.

✝ Press on even in the face of challenges, for that is how we grow.

Remember on this World Communion Sunday and always that our “Heavenly Call” is to live in love as we were created to do, and make use of the tools God provides for us to refocus on holy living. Amen.