

Maundy Thursday
April 21, 2011

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

+ Jesu juva +

PARABLES OF LENT - THE WICKED VINEDRESSERS

Luke 12:15-21, Psalm 39

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

During our Wednesday night services through Lent we have been hearing the parables that are not usually read in the Sunday morning services. Tonight there is one more parable to hear, a parable spoken by Jesus against the unbelieving leaders of the Jews during that first Holy Week that led up to His arrest and crucifixion.

“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. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

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

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’? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took

Him for a prophet." So far the text...

The Lord had built His Church, His Israel. He had said this them: "you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." He had through the giving of His covenant and of His Gospel planted it as a vineyard, built a hedge around it through His protection and care, dug a winepress in it by sending to them the power of His Spirit who was to bring forth in them fruits of good works and the wine of Divine love, and built a tower which is the Holy Scriptures by which they were to be ruled, strengthened in faith and guarded. And throughout the centuries He had sent to them His holy prophets, His servants, men who came in His name and with His authority.

And what did the men of this vineyard called Israel do? They wanted all of the benefits of the vineyard without the hassles and struggles of faithfulness. They wanted to be God's people; but they also wanted to be Baal's people, and Dagon's people, and Asherah's people, and Moloch's people. They wanted to live like the people who dwelt outside of their hedge. They wanted to conform and be accepted. And they wanted to treat the vineyard as if it were their own and as if they could live in whatever manner they chose within it. And so when these servants of God came and called them to repentance they threatened them, abused them, injured them and killed them.

And now the Son has come to them. He has entered the Holy Vineyard of Israel, has preached and worked miracles among them, has proven Himself the true Divine heir who is worthy of all worship and honor from men. But what do they do? They do just as Jesus said they would do in this parable. They plot and plan in secret among themselves to kill the Son of God, thinking that somehow this will make the vineyard of Israel truly their own. Kill the Son, they must have thought, and the Father will have no one else to send against them. Still wearing their masks of piety, they would be able enjoy all of the benefits of being the vinedressers: the prestige, the security, the income, the positions of influence. And so they meet quietly and confidentially with Judas the betrayer and launch their plans against Christ. And on this night, after the Supper, Jesus went out to Gethsemane to pray, and there He was betrayed and arrested. Through the night He was tried, mocked, abused, and gravely injured. And then in the morning He was hung up to die. And the wicked vinedressers supposed that they had won.

But they had not. Jesus, the Son and Heir of God the Father, was not defeated in death, but rather defeated death! For He rose again. Yes, "the Stone which the builders rejected has become the Chief Cornerstone." And now what judgment awaits those wicked vinedressers? "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

Before our Lord's betrayal on this holy night, He did something for the new vinedressers, giving them already to eat and drink the fruits of the vineyard, His own Divine love served and poured out for them in His own flesh and blood through the Feast of Holy Communion. And they, receiving this love from Him, were also to exhibit His love toward one another, in unity and fellowship with one another, working side by side in His vineyard through His grace. And so the Holy Church does to this day, keeping this Supper and striving to keep love and unity in the fellowship of Christ's vineyard as the true Israel, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Of course the Jews in Jesus day were not the last of the wicked vinedressers the church would have to face. Century upon century, decade upon decade, there have been those who wish to steal Christ's Church from Him and from His people. They reason among themselves "if we abuse them, if we injure them, if we cast them out, this will all be ours to do with as we wish!" Oh, they keep their pious face, of course; and they even do it in the name of Jesus as if they were furthering His work. But it is a deception rooted in a lie, a deception that sadly is believed even by those who help perpetrate it. But I ask you as Jesus Himself asked: "When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will become of those vinedressers?"

We must always remember what Jesus work this most Holy Week, what the work of His passion, death and resurrection means for the faithful. It means victory. It means hope. It means life and salvation. And our Lord gives to you the same gifts He gave Israel to strengthen them and to empower their faithful work in the vineyard. He gives you His Testament, His protection and care, His Spirit, His Scriptures. And He still sends His prophetic messengers to you which are faithful pastors.

But He gives you something more. He no longer calls you tenants. He calls you children. You share in the heirs inheritance by grace through faith in Him. And he gives you a marvelous, miraculous, astonishing gift that ancient Israel had not yet received. He gives you the Sacrament of His own flesh and blood to eat and drink, that you might be enlivened in faith and in love with one another, that you might be joined to Him and He to you, and that you may know His love intimately and be strengthened in His victory over your sins, over death, and against the power of all His enemies. Baptized into His family, firmly holding to His Word and Gospel, and keeping His Feast in faith, you will never be abandoned by Him, but will have the victory which He has already won. Now to Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, be all honor and glory in His Church now and forever. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +