

Luke 20:9-20

April 3, 2022

In the parable, the man who plants a vineyard is God. The tenants are the leaders of His people. The servants who are sent to collect fruits are the prophets. And the son of the vineyard owner who is thrown out of the vineyard and killed is Jesus.

I guess that leaves us off the hook. Apparently, you and I are not in the parable. Oh, but we are. After destroying the tenants, the owner gives the vineyard to others, says Jesus. And by “others,” He means us; Gentiles, who were not God’s people, but now are His people. He has brought us into His Kingdom of Grace, His Church, through Holy Baptism. To us He has given the vineyard, is what this means. And we are charged to care for it, and give Him fruits from it, fruits of repentance, of faith.

This is an act of pure grace, giving us the vineyard. We have done nothing to deserve it. We did not ask for it. We did nothing to acquire it. One of the most important words in the parable is the word *give*. The parable cannot be understood apart from this word. And, in fact, the reason why the tenants in the parable acted as they did and were destroyed is because they failed to grasp that word *give*.

When the servants are sent to collect fruits, the tenants refuse to give any of the fruits to them. Think about this. They give no fruits, fruits of faith to the servants, because they have no fruits to give. They have no faith. And then when they see the son of the owner coming, they plan to kill him and take the inheritance, the vineyard. But since when is an inheritance taken? An inheritance can only be given. But they do not grasp the word *give*.

Now perhaps, just perhaps these tenants, when they see the son of the vineyard owner coming, assume that the owner must be dead, and his son is coming to put things in order. So, if they kill the son, the heir, they could claim squatter’s rights and take the vineyard. They just don’t get it, do they? God’s kingdom, the vineyard, cannot be taken; it can only be given.

And the day of reckoning will come, says Jesus in the parable. The owner is not dead but very much alive. And when he comes, says Jesus, he will destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

And there is that word *give*. So, now you and I are the tenants, for God has given us the vineyard. And what are we doing with that word *give*? God expects us, just as He expected the tenants in the parable, to give Him some of the fruits, fruits of faith. Do we understand the word *give*? Look at your checkbook, and I’ll look at mine. God does not want all of the fruits of the vineyard. He wants some of them. We would have no fruits at all except that He first gave us the vineyard. And He expects us to care for the vineyard. Is this reflected by the checks that we write from our checkbook? Are we caring for the vineyard by supporting His Church, and this congregation, where He gives us the treasures of heaven in Word and Sacrament? Are we caring for the vineyard by supporting those who spread the Gospel into the world? Hopefully, yes to these. But if not, how are we different from the tenants in the parable?

God gives us seven days each week. He asks us to give Him some, not all, but some of the fruits of the vineyard. One morning each week is what He wants us to give to Him. Sunday morning to

gather here in His house so that He can give even more to us. Are we faithful in this, or are we acting like the tenants in the parable?

Whether it's our time, our treasures, or our talents, God has given to us for us to care for the vineyard. Not all, but some of these fruits, time, treasures, and talents, He wants us to give to Him. Is this too much for Him to ask?

It was of the tenants in the parable. What we see them doing should cause us to shudder. And perhaps it does. Yet if we search our own hearts and honestly look at how we have been living, we will find some, or much, of these tenants within ourselves as we realize that we, too, fail to grasp the word *give*.

And not so much our giving, but God's giving to us. We would have nothing to give, no faith, no fruits of faith, had God failed to grasp the word *give*. But that word *give* is what describes God in the first place. In fact, God gives so freely, so liberally, that His giving habits could be called into question. His giving is to the point of insanity.

The parable reflects this. He gave prophet after prophet to His people, seeking fruits of repentance and faith. One after another they were mistreated, insulted, and worse. Who in his right mind would think that they would respect his son? But that's the point. God is not in His right mind. He even says this. "*My thoughts are not your thoughts.*" No human mind would conceive of doing what God does. He sends His beloved Son, not to collect fruits of repentance, but to be killed; to be nailed to a cross by people who have no faith, no fruits of repentance to give. Because God gives to the point of pain, and beyond.

And this is still your God today. He doesn't see the fruits in you that He wants to see. So He gives His servant to you, not to condemn you and destroy you for your lack of fruits, but to forgive you. Yes, to forgive everyone of you. And to give you the body and blood of His beloved Son who was thrown out of the vineyard and killed on a cross.

My friends, behold your God. He gives, and not when He sees us giving. He gives, not so that we give to Him. He gives because this is who He is. He holds nothing back. He gives all that He has and is.

When we withhold more from Him, He gives more to us. The more we sin, the more He forgives. Jesus did not come to condemn you for your lack of fruits. He did not come to demand more from you. He came, and He is here today, for one reason. To give you grace upon grace. He forgives you no matter how much, or how little, you have given to Him.

The words *give* and *forgive* describe who Jesus is. And He is, as He says in the parable, the cornerstone of His Church, of the vineyard, of your very life. And the more you grasp who Jesus is and how He gives to you and forgives you, the more you will build your life upon Him, and give Him, freely and with joy, the fruits of faith He wants from you. Amen.