

**Luke 20:9-19**

I'm not sure who is more foolish here—the farmers or the landowner. The farmers thought they could get away with murder; but the landowner kept sending more servants and even his own son to those murderous tenants. Doesn't the saying go, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me?" You'd think the landowner would have realized, in time, that the farmers he rented his vineyard to simply could not be trusted. Perhaps that landowner was even more foolish than the farmers. They may have had evil in their hearts, but he should have known better than to think they would respect his son!

Is God an eternal optimist? He kept sending prophet after prophet to His people in the Old Testament. They mistreated them. They refused to listen to them. Some they even killed! But He kept sending more. And finally He sent His own Son. Does God close His eyes to the obvious and cross His fingers hoping for the best, even though any reasonable person could tell Him: If you send your Son to them, based on their past history, He is as good as dead; they will kill Him?

But He did...and they did. A week from this coming Friday is the day we set aside to commemorate the truth that God's Son was murdered in cold blood. Was God foolish? Is He foolish to send His Son into a world of thieves and murderers? Absolutely, yes! The landowner was foolish. God was foolish to send His Son to us knowing that He would be killed. But as the Apostle writes, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...To us it is the power of God."

This parable doesn't so much teach us that God is foolish as He is merciful; and He will give up everything, even His own Son, to save us from our sins. It may sound like foolishness, but it is pure love and mercy.

In the parable the landowner, who is God, rents out His vineyard to some farmers. That makes sense. It's good business. What doesn't make sense is that the farmers refused to give the landowner some of the grapes in the harvest. He was entitled! It's his vineyard! They weren't the owners, he was. But they sent his servants away empty-handed. They refused to acknowledge that the landowner was deserving of his share of the grapes.

What also does not make sense is that when they saw the landowner's son coming to them, they reasoned together: If we kill him the vineyard will be ours; we will inherit it. Rather than inheriting the vineyard, however, Jesus says that those farmers will be killed and the vineyard given to others. And that's what happened. The Chief Priests and Scribes, and others who hated the Son of God and through Pilate had Him put to death, perished in their sins; and the blessings of salvation (the vineyard) were given to people like you and me.

The mistake those farmers made in their thinking is that an inheritance can be taken. But an inheritance can never be taken—it can only be given. If the Son is killed, then yes, someone will receive the vineyard as an inheritance. But the key word here is "receive." No one can take God's vineyard. God can only give it; and He, friend, in mercy gives it to you.

In your baptism God made you His child, His heir, one who receives His vineyard—the blessings of salvation. You were baptized into the death of Christ so that everything Jesus

has is now yours. Not because you took it—an inheritance can never be taken—but because He gives it to you freely in mercy. The vineyard is yours. You are not just farmers, tenants, renting out the vineyard. What is God's is yours because He has made you His rightful heir. You are as much a part of His family as God's Son is. And so you work in the family vineyard, not as His slaves, but as members of the family. You serve God in His Church and in your vocation, not because He hired you as renters, but because in mercy He loved you and said, "What's Mine is yours."

And so what do you and I do with the harvest? We don't need to selfishly act like those wicked farmers and refuse to give God of our time and money, our love and service. Rather we can live as His baptized children and give back to Him out of love what He has given to us.

And yet, how often don't you and I act just like those farmers? When God asks us for two or three hours from our entire week, we turn His servant away empty-handed and say, "No!" When God asks us to give back to Him of the money He freely gives to us, we say, "No! What's mine is mine." God doesn't treat us like those wicked tenants, but we act like them anyway. They selfishly desired to give nothing to the landowner. You and I selfishly desire to give nothing back to God.

It's true. We, like those farmers in the parable, tend to think that what's ours is ours even though all we have has been given by God. We think that coming to church once or twice a week is taking precious time out of our busy week. We think that being in the Bible a few minutes each day is robbing us of our time. We think that when we give money into the collection plate, it's something we should do but we hate to give it up. We act like tenants and not like God's dear children. We begrudge giving anything to Him even though we are part of His family.

Don't you see...God's doesn't want what you have. He desires to take what you give Him and give it back to you as a rich blessing. When you give Him a few hours on Sunday morning, He gives those hours back to you packed full of blessings. You don't lose a thing by hearing His Word. Rather, you gain confident hope and a stronger faith. When you give God of your income you don't lose a thing. He gives it back to you full of blessings. He causes you to become rich with the knowledge that He will take care of you in every way, and He does.

Why do you think the landowner in the parable wanted some of the harvest from the vineyard? So he could make wine from the grapes for the farmers and their families, and others, to enjoy. And that is why God desires for you to give Him your time and attention a few hours each week— so that as you give Him your ears, He can put there His Word of Life for you to have. So that as you attend His Holy Supper, He can give you the fruit of the vineyard and with that wine, the blood of Christ for you. God is not some greedy landowner. He doesn't take for Himself. He only gives. Whatever you give Him He returns to you with blessings manifold.

Perhaps we should consider what we have been doing with God's vineyard here in Augusta, Missouri. Very few of us give God our ears a couple of hours each week so that He can give us life and salvation through His Word. Very few of us give Him our mouths so that He can give us the body and blood of our Savior. Very few of us know the rich blessings

that God gives when we give Him a tenth of our income. It seems like so many of God's people here in Augusta are living more like selfish tenants than like His dear children.

How do you think that makes God feel? Actually, it makes Him even more merciful to you. For when sin abounds, there His grace abounds even more. Whether you act like a tenant or like His child, He loves you, and He knows you only as His dear child through Holy Baptism. Whether or not you are in the habit of giving God your time and attention, He forgives you—not because of what you give to Him, but because Jesus gave Himself for you. There isn't one person sitting here today whom God does not forgive. Each one of you, right now, can have confidence in knowing through the word placed into your ears, that God tells you in mercy—He forgives your sins against Him.

He will not take His vineyard away from you. You are His child—His heir. What's His is yours through Christ Jesus. And that's why you can live before Him, not as hired tenants, but as whom you really are—His forgiven children. Amen.