

This parable is a horrible story. It's filled with violence, bloodshed, and murder. It's the kind of story we might see in a Hollywood movie. One that is rated R. So, let's grab our pop and popcorn and settle into our seats. What we have here before us is a gripping tale. Good thing it's just a parable, more of a fictional story and not true to life.

Oh, but just wait a second. It says at the end that when the chief priests and Pharisees heard the parable, they knew immediately it was not just fiction. They did not applaud afterwards. They wanted to arrest the Storyteller because the story was about them and they knew it.

What about you and me? Are we also in the story? Is it about us? If so, what will be our reaction upon hearing it? Applause or anger? I have no control over that. But God does. So, let's draw the curtains and begin.

A master of a house plants a vineyard. He is careful in every detail. Putting in a fence, a winepress, and a tower. Then he leases it to tenants and goes into another country. This all makes sense so far. This is typically what a landowner might do.

It also makes sense that when the season for fruit draws near, the landowner sends servants to collect the fruit. What doesn't make sense is that the tenants beat the servants and even kill some of them. This is not rational behavior. This is pure evil.

But the story plot takes an even stranger twist. The owner of the vineyard sends more servants. Is he serious? Does he think the tenants will suddenly change their behavior and give this new batch of servants the fruit for which they are sent? Because they don't. They beat and kill them too.

And then the plot takes the strangest twist and turn of all. The landowner sends his own son to these murderers. What father in his right mind would do such a thing? Do the tenants respect his son? Of course not. They throw him out of the vineyard and murder him.

A parable, yes, but not a fictional story. God is the owner of the vineyard. This is His kingdom, the people He has gathered for Himself. Because they are His own people, He expects to see in them the fruits of faith. Beginning with Moses, He sent prophet after prophet to His people. "*Bear fruits in keeping with repentance,*" they cried. But these servants of God were mistreated. They were ignored, beaten, and even killed. God kept sending prophets, the last one being John the Baptist. But he, too, was put to death.

Finally, God sent His Son. And did they respect Jesus? Did they listen to Him. No. They threw Him out of Jerusalem, out of the vineyard, and they hanged Him on a tree to die.

Now, the chief priests and Pharisees clearly understand this parable. In three days they would arrest Jesus and murder Him on a cross. They have been plotting for some time to kill the son of the vineyard owner. They have zero respect for Jesus. They want Him dead.

This is irrational thinking. They are God's beloved people. And yet they plot to kill the very Son of God? They are out of their minds. Pure insanity.

But do you want to hear about some more irrational behavior? Yours. And mine. Our baptism into Christ identifies us as God's beloved people. And as our God who claims us for His own, He expects to collect fruits from us. The fruits of repentance; fruits of faith. Yet do we not often resemble the tenants in the parable? In this way – we act as if we are the owners of the vineyard, of everything that God leases to us.

Like the tenants in the parable who refused to give the owner of the vineyard the fruits he wanted and deserved, we, too often, turn God away and refuse Him. We think our money and possessions belong to us. We think our time is ours to use how we please. We think that we have authority over our bodies and our abilities.

It is sin to treat God as if He is the tenant and we are the owners. And it is sin to deny Him the fruits of repentance; to go on with our behavior as if we're doing nothing wrong. Sin is irrational, for the essence of sin is to reject the loving God who made us and who gives us everything that we have.

But now listen to this. The most irrational, insane behavior of all is not ours, not the behavior of the wicked tenants in the parable; it is the behavior of the owner of the vineyard, of God. God acts in ways that make no sense. Why did He send prophet after prophet to His people – servant after servant in the parable – knowing they would be mistreated and killed? And why did He send His Son to those murderers? Wickedness is irrational behavior. But even more irrational is how God responds in mercy to such wickedness.

I speak from experience. Again and again, many times over, I have acted like the tenants in the parable. I have sinned against my loving God day in and day out my entire life. This is insane. How can I treat God this way? He who has only ever shown love to me? But God is more insane than I am. He is patient and kind toward me. He continues to call me to repentance day after day. And He forgives me over and over and over.

And He is the same toward you. He is insane with mercy for you. So insane that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for you.

By human standards, God is certifiably insane. Completely and utterly irrational. To forgive you for your sins against Him again and again, day after day, this makes no sense to our feeble minds. But this is your God. He sent Christ Jesus to die on the cross for you. He baptized you into Christ. He nourishes your faith through Word and Sacrament. And He never stops forgiving you.

What is your reaction to all of this? No need to applaud. But you can, and surely do, rejoice in your heart. God will never change toward you. He is, and always will be, insane with love and mercy for you. And this, my friend, is your salvation. Amen.