

Matthew 21:33-46

They say that there are two kinds of people in the world--givers and takers. In this parable we meet both. We meet the giver. He was master of a house. He planted a vineyard, did everything to make it a fruitful vineyard, and then gave it into the care of tenants. At the proper time he sent servants to collect the fruit. When that turned out poorly, he sent other servants. After that also ended in disaster, he sent his son. The master was not a taker; he was a giver. He gave his money to build the vineyard. He gave the tenants a job in caring for the vineyard. He gave his servants, and even his son to the tenants, trusting them to do what was right with them when it was time to gather the fruits.

The tenants in the parable were takers. When the servants came for the fruit, they beat them and killed them. When more servants came, they did the same thing to them. Finally, when they saw the son coming, they said, "*Let's kill him and take his inheritance.*" They gave nothing to the master except grief. They took what did not belong to them. They were not givers; they were takers.

The master in the parable is God. God is a giver. There is nothing that any of us has which was not given to us by God. God is not a taker. Even when we give Him our offerings, He simply uses them to give back to us. He multiplies them so that they are a blessing to many.

The way God gives is beyond our understanding. So much so, that we might even refer to His actions as pure lunacy. Look at this master. His servants are mistreated. They are beaten, stoned, and killed. Would a sane master send more servants? No! He would send his armies. But not this one. He sends more servants, and they beat, stone, and kill them. Now the master shows that he has lost his mind. He sends his son to these worthless tenants. His son! Is he thinking that the third time is a charm? That they got all the killing out of their system? What parent in his right mind would send his son to a gang of ruthless killers? Would you send your child to the ISIS terrorists who are beheading Americans as fast as they can kidnap them? Of course not! But this master did. He sends his son, and quick as they can, they put his son to death.

Now obviously we do not care much for these tenants in the parable. But isn't it true that we have our doubts about the master as well? He pretty much got what was coming to him in giving his servants, and then his son, into the hands of murderers. Isn't that the definition of insanity?...*"doing the same thing over and over, but expecting different results."*

Friends, what is insane to us is perfectly normal and natural to God. Was it normal, when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, for God to take the blame? To us, no; but to God, yes. Was it normal for God to send prophet after prophet after prophet, all the way to John the Baptist, knowing that His prophets would be mistreated, beaten, killed, even beheaded? To us, no; but to God, yes. Was it normal for God to give His Son, Jesus, into the hands of murderers, knowing they would nail Him to a cross? To us, no; but to God, yes. Let's just come right out and say it: God is insane. He acts in ways which are pure lunacy. He does what no normal person would ever do.

But friends, this is why we have hope, comfort, and salvation. God does what no one would do. He comes in the person of Jesus Christ to stand in for you as the One accused and condemned. He takes your sin and punishment. He literally suffers hell in your place. Even though we are the ones who mistreat His servants, who caused His beloved Son to be put to death on a cross, because our sins put Him there, God loves you with all His heart, and He forgives all your sin.

This is not normal behavior. But then, God is not normal...humanly speaking. God is love; He loves those who hate Him. God is merciful; He has compassion and pity on those who mistreat Him. God is gracious; He forgives those who sin against Him. God is pure giver...the giver of forgiveness, life, and salvation to sinners like us.

So which are we...givers or takers? Neither. God is the one who gives. Even when we give as Christians, it is God giving through us. Takers take what does not belong to them. But everything God gives to you is what He wants you to have. You are receivers. You do not take God's gifts as though they were not for you; you receive them because they are for you.

The tenants had it all wrong. "*Let's kill the son,*" they said, "*and take his inheritance.*" But the vineyard--God's kingdom--cannot be taken; it can only be given. You became a receiver in your baptism. God took His vineyard away from those worthless tenants and He gave it to you. In baptism God gave you the inheritance of His Son. The fruits of the cross were given to you--forgiveness, faith, the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of heaven. You are a receiver sitting here in church. His gifts are given to you through His living words coming into your ears. You are a receiver at the Table of Holy Communion. Jesus' inheritance--what He gained and purchased by His blood shed on Calvary is given to you through your mouth as Christ comes to you in bread and wine.

By nature--and this is our problem with all this--we are takers and not receivers. Our sinful flesh does not want to receive; it wants to take. We are like those awful tenants. We think the vineyard can be taken. We don't want to receive a place in heaven from God; we want to take it. Our flesh battles against our giving God. He desires to give His gifts to us through His words given us here in church, through Holy Baptism and Holy Communion...but our stubborn flesh doesn't want to receive these gifts. We think we can take them by living a decent life. We think we can take heaven by force by obeying God's Commandments rather than by receiving heaven through Word and Sacrament.

But those who think and live this way will meet up with the same fate as those tenants. They were put to a miserable death and the vineyard was given to others. You and I, friends, must daily battle against what our flesh wants. We must repent of our desire to take the things of God through what we do and how we live. Nothing of God can be taken. It all can only be received through faith in Christ, because heaven and every other blessing of God is a gift, and gifts cannot be taken but only received.

And so in the world there may be two kinds of people--givers and takers. But within God's church there is only the Giver and receivers. If you are here today to receive, then you are truly blessed because God is here to give to you. All His gifts in Christ are yours. He forgives you freely for Jesus' sake. He gives you faith to believe this. He gives you His Holy Spirit to resist your sinful flesh day after day. He gives you peace, and joy, and comfort in Christ. He gives you His vineyard--a place in heaven with Him.

And because you are receivers of God's gifts, He will give to others through you. And they, too, will rejoice with you in being, not takers, but receivers of what God has to give. This way of thinking, of believing, of living, is pure lunacy in the eyes of the world. But it's the way God works within His church. No matter how sinful you are, no matter how much of a taker you have been, God gives. He gives to you. He gives from a merciful, forgiving heart for Jesus' sake. Amen.