

Sermon  
Proper 22, Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 2, 2011

It is really difficult to understand the actions of the landowner in today's gospel reading. He keeps sending his slaves to collect what he is due; the wicket tenants/farmers keep beating them up, stoning them, and eventually killing them. So what does the landowner do...does he call the authorities and have them arrested for assault and murder...nope...he sends his son to them. Who would do this? Who would send his son into harms way like this? It makes no sense. Until you figure out just who the landlord is.

So, to understand this parable, let's consider the six main players. The landowner is God. The vineyard is Israel. The Tenants/farmers are the Jewish religious leadership. The landowner's servants are the obedient prophets who preached God's word to the people. The Son is Jesus and the other tenants are the Gentiles....us.

With this parable Jesus is saying to the Chief Priest and the elders, God has trusted you to tend to this land of Israel and its people and when he sent his prophets to tell you what was wrong and how to correct it, you beat them,...Jeremiah was mobbed right in the

temple... and you stoned them..... and then you killed them.

Stephen was stoned to death.....John the Baptist was killed... And now, when God has sent you his Son, you don't recognize Him for who He is, and you are even going to kill him. And, even though it was the law at the time, that if there were no heirs, then the property would pass to those in possession, Jesus is saying to them, you will not inherit. You will be broken by the one you reject and on this rejected one, will be established the very path of inheritance.

This parable is still relevant today. God has given us the responsibility of caring for this land. Have we been good tenants? Have we cared properly for our environment or our people? Have we abused the modern day prophets, like the wicket tenants did the prophets of their day? Do we scorn them and make light of their prophetic voices? Do we heed the warnings being given to us today? Are we fruitful? Are we faithful laborers? Do we go out and harvest the fields? Have we also rejected the cornerstone? Do we accept Jesus as God's Son and our savior? Do we live our day-to-day lives as living examples of a godly people? How would we answer the question posed in the gospel today?

“Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

I was on Facebook this past week and I saw today’s gospel posted.

Instead of the entire reading for today, it ended with that question

“Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” The person who had posted it said it was posted this way so that those who were reading it could decide for themselves what they would do and not be influenced by the answers given in the Gospel.

One of the people that commented on this post wrote: For beating, stoning and killing the slaves, they should be required to serve the landowner as slaves for the rest of their lives. One wrote, for killing the son, maybe capital punishment or life imprisonment. But, one wrote, that for killing the son, the wicked tenants should be made to give the owner each of their first born sons to be raised in the owners household as his own. Of course, then, ironically, the wicked tenant’s heirs would become heirs of the vineyard.....hmmmmm

Listen to what Paul's wrote to the Romans:

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”

Ironically, the wicked tenant's heirs would become heirs of the vineyard.... The Wicked Tenant's Heirs Would Become The Heirs Of The Vineyard.... Weren't our ancestors the wicked tenants, and Didn't we through the son's death become the heirs? Weren't we given to the owner by our baptism? And weren't we raised in the owner's house? Aren't we now heirs of the Kingdom of God?

So my answer to the open question “what then should the owner do to these wicked tenants”

Exactly what he did. He gave it to those of us who would live the Kingdom life. Even after we killed the son....

For those of us given into God's household, and raised in God's mercy and grace, were made children of God, and as children of God, heirs also...heirs to the Kingdom of God. Think about what this truly means. We will be granted eternal life...we will live with God for

eternity...we, the ancestors of the wicked tenants....We have inherited the kingdom of God.