



SAINT LUKE'S

THE 18TH AFTER PENTECOST
YEAR A

ISAIAH 5:1-7
PSALM 80:7-14
PHILIPPIANS 3:4B -14
MATTHEW 21:33-46

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN
OCTOBER 8, 2017

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells another unpopular parable. He tells us the parable of the vineyard in which a landowner has provided all things necessary for tenant farmers to reap a successful harvest including proper fencing, a winepress, and a watchtower. The landowner, who normally lives elsewhere, sends his servants to collect the harvest from the tenant farmers, but the tenant farmers kill the servants. The landowner sends more servants and the tenant farmers again kill the landowner's servants. The landowner thinks sending his own son will make all the difference but the tenant farmers kill the landowner's son too.

Jesus knows he will be put to death ~ and that people will try to make sense of his death. But in this parable, Jesus shows us that our rejection of God's love and truth results in violence and in death. Let's think about the parable this way: God carefully and skillfully provided an abundant setting and entrusted it to human beings. God maintained relations with humans, despite the fact that we rejected God over and over ~ and that we even resulted to violence to avoid that relationship with God. Yet, God persisted and did not give up on us. God kept sending authorized representatives, despite human objection and rejection. Finally, God sends his own Son to show us how to live, not for ourselves but for live for God and for others, and we killed him ~ because, well, changing our ways is just too hard.

From a human point of view, we think that God will just kill us too and make a new start with humanity. That's only fair...That makes things even, right? That would be just. That's what the disciples think would be fair

when Jesus asks them. But that's where we get it wrong. God is not bound by a sense of human fairness or justice. God's sense of justice is far more merciful than we could ask or imagine. Jesus reminds us of the Scriptures, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." You see God does not get revenge. God doesn't get even. God turns things on its head and saves us despite of our bad behaviour. God responds to our evil with more love because God's love wins. God's love for us is so strong, so bonded, so everlasting that God will stop at nothing to draw us more and more to Godself. God took Jesus whom he sent, and despite our rejection and execution of him, God exalted him in the most amazing way.

Paul, in today's reading from Philippians, gets just how amazing this is. At first, Paul seems a bit boastful in telling us just how great he is and how great his faith is. Paul starts off by saying how his family followed all of the Jewish customs, he kept all the laws, that he was righteous and blameless - and I think he probably meant to add just how humble he was too. And anytime we hear Paul talk about "the flesh," think 'ego.' That's a better context for us to understand what Paul is writing about. In this passage, he is responding to some others who have a difference of opinion. They are arguing about whether or not keeping certain cultural customs is necessary - and they lay out all their credentials. So Paul feels the need to list his as well - and basically to say that they all mean nothing. But Paul realises that all his accomplishments, his awards, his badges of honor... are all meaningless without Christ. He sees that living perfectly according to certain laws and customs is empty compared to living a full life extended to us in Jesus, which connects us directly to God. And this new life that Paul

has through Jesus gives him hope ~ and it gives us hope too. By virtue of being in Christ and knowing him, Paul knows that we who are also in Christ can endure all things, even suffering because we know that on the other end of persecution and death is resurrection and life in God.

We too know about suffering. Suffering is real. And last Sunday it happened again. We endured yet another mass shooting in our country. More than 50 people lost their lives in terror at the hands of a mad-man with many guns. How much more can we take? How many more lives will we lose before we as a nation confront our gun laws? It is the same violence that rejected God's love sent to us. It's not a new problem ~ and it won't stop until we learn to love human life over our need for control and to play God ourselves. But we can't do that until we ourselves acknowledge our own brokenness.

We as the Church must listen to the Gospel lesson today for its word of judgement. We can't just reject the Good News of Jesus because it doesn't make logical sense in our world ~ that is because love is never going to make logical sense in a world where people kill each other. But Jesus doesn't call us to make logical sense of everything; Jesus calls us to be faithful and follow where he leads. Sometimes that might embarrass us in a world where love makes no logical sense ~ but I think our lack of bearing good fruit, our hardness of heart, our lack of charity for our neighbors is an embarrassment to God.

Matthew's Gospel today tells us that the Word of God, namely Jesus, is a powerful stone, pounding our hearts, destroying our ego. He says, "The one

who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces.” And in this brokenness is opportunity for new life in God. This stone, which has been rejected and is now the chief cornerstone, not only breaks us open, but it also heals us. It reclaims us and tells us we cannot do this on our own. It calls us back to God and draws us together. We are given new opportunities to yield new fruit in God’s vineyard...fruits of the Spirit.

The ultimate message of the Gospel is that we cannot save ourselves ~ and thanks be to God that we can’t. When we try to save ourselves, like those in the vineyard, we end up acting in violence. But God’s love for us is so strong and true that God will save us even from ourselves. May we be given the grace to be more cooperative. And may we recognise and acknowledge our brokenness as opportunity for God’s healing presence to call us more and more into fuller life in Christ our Lord. May we seek the nourishment of Christ through his sacraments to be healed and strengthened that we may be fruitful laborers in God’s vineyard, ever seeking to produce the good fruits of faith, hope, and love.

✠ In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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