

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 8, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.

Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now, I will let you know what I mean to do with my vineyard: take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it. The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! for justice, but hark, the outcry!

Psalm: Ps 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

R. (Isa 5:7a) The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

A vine from Egypt you transplanted;
you drove away the nations and planted it.
It put forth its foliage to the Sea,
its shoots as far as the River.

Why have you broken down its walls,
so that every passer-by plucks its fruit,
The boar from the forest lays it waste,
and the beasts of the field feed upon it?

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.
O LORD, God of hosts, restore us;
if your face shine upon us, then we shall be saved.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

Brothers and sisters: Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of

praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times." Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

This Sunday we hear two stories about a vineyard. Let's compare them.* The First Reading tells about "a friend" who carefully built a vineyard, clearing stones, building a watchtower, planting the choicest vines. He even "hewed out a wine press." But his vineyard yielded bad grapes. In vivid language, God tells the chief priests and elders that they themselves are this vineyard and that he is going to destroy them and trample them down because they would not let God's love grow up among them! Then in the Gospel, Jesus takes the same tale and embroiders it. In just one sentence he handles the part about planting a vineyard, digging the wine press, building the tower. But then he goes further. He has the owner rent his rich vineyard to tenants (as was the custom). Then he trusts his tenants to raise choice grapes. When in due season he sends servants to collect the yield—which must have been great because the tenants dishonestly want to keep everything, including the vineyard—they beat or stoned or even killed his servants! In a surprising twist to the tale, seemingly an implausible one, Jesus says that the owner kindly decides to send his own son. He thinks that the tenants will surely respect his beloved offspring. Would you have done this? Wouldn't you have said, "I will keep my family away from these criminals"? I surely would have. Not this owner. He sent his beloved son directly into the trap. The tenants kill him.

The owner has spent all his resources, even his own son, with no response. So at last he ejects the tenants and gives care of his vineyard to people who will listen. Our First Reading tells the dishonest vineyard that God will "make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but will be overgrown with thorns and briars." The details of these two parables are different, aren't they? But aren't they the same story, about *God punishing those who fail to produce*? Does God punish those who fail to produce? Be careful, because the stories do not turn out to be identical at all. As Jesus puts it, have you never read in the scriptures that, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes.** This is not a generic condemnation of disobedient servants. The person who is telling this parable *is himself the very "stone that the builders rejected"*! Our repeated failure to accept God's love has resulted now in a final invitation, one concerning the teller of the tale, God's own child. Many do not see it this way, as we know. Our Jewish sisters and brothers hope for Christians to stop blaming them for the death of the messiah. We respect that, at least I hope and plead that we do. And of course, the secular world of our day simply washes all belief away in favor of cell phones and digital phones and the world's buying power. And so on. Yet we continue to tell Jesus' story of his love and his suffering, and of God's love brought to fulfillment in his life. We will hear it Sunday in a parable. Be sure to listen.

* Stories: our brains love stories because they tell about the "before-and-after," which are built right into our lives, so we recognize them. They carry also suspense, action, relationship and intercommunication—not to mention emotion and disappointment and elation, and so on. These elements resemble our daily experience more than any other device we have in the language.

**It is thought that Jesus is referring to Isaiah 5, or in other words, our First Reading.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. "Isaiah sings about his friend's vineyard: "Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?" What kind of "grapes" will God find in your vineyard?
2. What are all people of good will reaching for when they embrace "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, ... anything worthy of praise"? What can you embrace if you are tied up with anxieties?
3. Who are God's messengers right now? What changes in society do they advocate? How can you somehow be God's envoy in your community, work, Church or the world? Can you move toward changes in society?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, who in the abundance of your kindness surpass the merits and the desires of those who entreat you, pour out your mercy upon us to pardon what conscience dreads and to give what prayer does not dare to ask. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen