

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost/October 4, 2020
Matthew 21:33-46/A Nation Bearing Fruit
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“... given to a people producing its fruits.”

These words of the Son of God, as ominous and threatening as they are for the chief priests and elders of the Jews, actually speak of a great gift for you, for you are that nation bearing fruit of which Jesus speaks. We know this to be true because among you, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

Jesus Christ and Him crucified for our sins is the center and cornerstone of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, the LCMS and the whole Christian Church on earth. On this cornerstone, the very kingdom of God is built. But our Lord Jesus Himself warns us the kingdom of God will be taken from any who reject the Son and the means by which the Spirit of God brings Him into the world. That is the curse placed upon the unfaithful leaders gathered in the temple courts before the very Temple of God who is Christ Jesus. These leaders even recognize and rightly conclude what will happen to the vinedresser tenants.

Yet what they fail to recognize is they are the evil tenants, following in the footsteps of their fathers who beat, killed, and stoned God’s messengers, even as Jesus spoke, they were the ones of the parable: “Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those

tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

This curse upon those unfaithful leaders in Jesus’ day serves also as a warning to the new vinedressers of the vineyard, the Holy Christian Church, the baptized children of God, otherwise, you and I.

According to an oft used quote from Luther, “whenever a cathedral is built, the devil builds a chapel next door.” Worse yet, he seeks to establish a foothold within the very walls of the cathedral as we see in the case of the temple leaders of the Jews. It is no different today. The way the devil sneaks in and gains a foothold as he did with the Jewish leaders, is to make us tenants think the temple of our body, the vineyard of the church and the work done in and by them belong to us rather than to the Lord. There is no work of Pastor Jerry, no work of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, no work of the LCMS. There is no work even of the Holy Christian Church. Just as there was no work of chief priest and elders of Israel; only the work of the Lord.

“For even though otherwise we experience much good from men, still whatever we receive by His command or arrangement is all received from God. For our parents, and all rulers, and every one besides with respect to his neighbor, have received from God the command that they should do us all manner of good, so that we receive these blessings not from them, but, through them, from God. For creatures are only the hands, channels, and means whereby God gives all things, as He gives to the mother breasts and milk to offer to her child, and corn and all manner of produce from the earth for nourishment, none of which blessings could be produced by any creature of itself.” Luther’s LC, 1st Commandment, Para 6.

While God uses all people of the world to deliver earthly blessings such as food, clothing, shelter, civil order, it is you He uses to bring the good news of salvation in Christ to the world. But woe to us if we ever think it is, we who are givers rather than God using us through which He distributes His blessings to a sinful world.

The chief priests and the Pharisees were given the task of delivering the kingdom of God to His chosen people, Israel. It was the people of Israel to whom it was given to know the forgiveness of sins through the sacrificial system of the temple. By accepting the animal sacrifices brought by the people and offered by the priests, God revealed His presence among them was for the purpose of forgiving them, not destroying them. It was not the proper act of sacrifice by which the people gained God's attention and won His favor, but it was God who invited His people to come into His presence and discover His all-consuming love for them. But God's love had turned into the deeds of men, a special caste of men who alone knew how and were able to please an angry God who would otherwise bring vengeance upon them. The priests had become no different than the pagan priests who offered up even human sacrifices to an angry God. The Pharisees were no different than those spiritual coaches and guides today who say what you need to do is give your heart to God and devote your life to Him in order to fulfill your purpose or guarantee the success of God's mission.

It is true enough; God was and is angry over sin. But not because He wants to get even with those who hurt and insulted Him. His anger over sin is of a Father who knows and sees how sin hurts His children and prevents them from receiving His blessings in time and eternity.

It is also true God has a purpose for you and a desire to spread the reign and joys of citizenship in His kingdom through you. But this is not because of the passion and efforts you add to His grace for the

completion of His work, rather because of His passion and work He completed for you in His Son Christ Jesus that springs forth from you like grapes from a well-tended vineyard.

Today, since the eternal sacrifice was given once and for all on Calvary in the bloody suffering and death of God's one and only Son. We know it was received and accepted as sufficient by His glorious resurrection and ascension to the Father, God reveals Himself in love to us in a sacramental system. Rather than priests who alone came before the Lord on behalf of the people and teachers who revealed what those sacrifices meant for the life of God's people, God now sends pastors to deliver the forgiveness of sins through the preaching of the Word, Baptism, public and private absolution, and the Lord's Supper. To teach you how these are the things in which God is actually present here and now to save you, love you, and shower you with His eternal gifts.

There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. He leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent His servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. What a blessing to be a tenant and vinedresser in the vineyard. We are planted in God's vineyard, the holy Christian and apostolic church, where: We are hedged around by the heavenly hosts for our protection from the evil one. We are given a winepress with an unlimited supply of grapes for the harvest; the holy ministry that pours forth the means of grace by which God is truly present with us. The Lord Himself inhabits the tower in our midst as He rules over the heavenly nation, He has gathered together to forgive all your sins and sends you forth to make disciples of all nations so you and they will live together in the new heavens and new earth.