

***Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025***  
***A FRUITLESS VINYARD***

***Prayer***

Jesus, give us ears to hear and hearts to understand the truths that you have revealed through the parable and sermon today.

AMEN

***Background***

In today's Gospel reading, we see Jesus preaching a sermon on a text from the Old Testament, not unlike the rabbinic tradition of His day. He was preaching to not only His disciples, but the Pharisees and others who were in the temple in Jerusalem that day. We know his based on the prior chapter, where it recounts (Luke 19:47-48)

*And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.*

The text Christ used is found in Isaiah 5. I don't want to read the entire chapter, but listen to verse 7, so we can have the same understanding as Jesus's audience (Isaiah 5:7):

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*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,  
and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked  
for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but  
behold, an outcry!*

Whenever Jesus teaches in parables, our natural inclination is to say, "So which character am I?" Let me short-circuit that process a bit and name the players.

From Isaiah, we know that the owner of the vineyard is God the Father and the vineyard itself is the people of Israel, His chosen people. From history we can deduce that the servants are the prophets sent by God to His people, who often were often treated poorly by them. Why you ask? Because the prophets often preached the Law and the Gospel. The hearers were uncomfortable because the Law convicted them and indignant because of the generosity of the Gospel. We really do want to be shepherd of our own lives rather than sheep of God's flock.

From verse 13:

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*the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'*

We can make the connection between God the Father and the beloved son whom he sends. Jesus is indeed the beloved Son of the Father. This title was used by the Father at Jesus's baptism, where He said in the amplified translation (Luke 9:35):

*"This is My beloved Son, My Chosen One; listen and obey and yield to Him!"*

And you, who have been baptized into Christ, are indeed beloved by God as well and have had your sins washed away by the blood of the cross. Continuing in verse 14

*But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.'*

And so, they did. The tenants, the teachers of the law, the Pharisees and Sadducees, conspired with the Roman government to brutalize and kill the Son of God by nailing Him to a cross on a hill outside of Jerusalem.

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***Righteousness According to the Law***

The tenants wanted the vineyard for themselves, they wanted all the false fruit of their self-righteousness. They really had nothing good to give to the servants when they came seeking the harvest of good fruit (v 10, 11, & 12), because they were only producing fruit according to the Law, fruit that was indeed rotten. They did appear to keep the law in its externalities, but that's why Christ says (Matt 23:27):

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.*

The vineyard was truly dry, withered, and barren.

In his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5:8-11) Paul writes about how we are to respond to such fruitless deeds of darkness:

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases*

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*the Lord. **Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness but rather expose them.***

However, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that **WE** cannot keep the law either. In fact, we read in John's first letter (1:8-10)

*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

And even the good that we try to do by our own efforts is tainted with our own selfish desires and motivations – so what are we to do?

***Righteousness According to the Promise***

In verse 16, we read

*[God] will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.*

If the vineyard is taken away from the house of Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, to whom has it been given?

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To the spiritual heirs, according to the promise given to him, as recorded by Moses in the book of Genesis (Gen 22:18)

*". . . and in your offspring [singular] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."*

Note that the obedience is one of belief, trusting in the promises of God that He will indeed do what He says He will do.

Paul's writing reveals that the promise has been given to ALL nations and that the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been torn down. You, dear friends, hear the words of promise read and preached. They have created faith in you to trust and rely on the promises of God instead of your own efforts, therefore YOU are the spiritual heirs of Abraham and the new tenants of the vineyard. Hear the words of Christ, as recorded by St. John (15:5)

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

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Because you are in Christ, your sins have been forgiven, you will bear good fruit, and you have the sure promise of eternal life with your Lord.

***How Can I Be Sure I'm in?***

How can you be sure you are in Christ? God knows that we at times we can't trust either our feelings or our logic. Because of this, He works through means.

We **KNOW** that we belong to Christ because we were buried with Him in baptism, marked with the sign of His cross, and sealed with the free gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

We **KNOW** that we belong to Christ because not 20 minutes ago, we confessed all our sins and iniquities and heard from Pastor Jeong's lips that our sins were forgiven.

We **KNOW** that we belong to Christ because we believe the words in His last testament, that we receive the very body and blood of our Lord in, with, and under simple bread and wine, given to us for the forgiveness of sins, at this altar week after week.

I invite you to come, taste, and see that the Lord is indeed good. AMEN