

Sermon for the 5th Sunday in Lent
Rev. Michael Schuessler
Text: Luke 20:9-10

Jesus went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty handed.”

Jesus liked to tell stories. In our Gospel reading he tells the story of the tenants in the vineyard. But what is Jesus trying to teach us? God is the man who planted the vineyard. Perhaps the vineyard is the church. That would make us the farmers. The fruit God wants would be our time, talent and treasure. If we don't pay up, perhaps he will come and destroy us. Did Jesus tell this parable to warn us about selfishness? Not really. If we mistakenly assumed that the parable was mostly about us, we are reminded that it's easy to become self-centered. Even when we focus on others, we are tempted to choose the people for whom we're willing to sacrifice.

Jesus told this parable about himself. He wanted people to know that he was going to die. God is the landowner. Through the prophet Isaiah God explained that his chosen people the Israelites are his vineyard. They were supposed to live godly lives for all to see so that others would want to worship the true God. Sadly, leaders throughout Israel's history were selfish and led the people astray. God sent prophets, the servants who were rejected. Finally he sent his Son. In the parable, the

farmers put the son to death so that they could remain in control. When Jesus was born King Herod tried to kill him. Now the scribes and Pharisees want to get rid of Jesus. In the parable Jesus points ahead to the fact that he will indeed be killed.

In the parable, the landowner is interested in justice. He punishes the people who killed his son, and since there is no heir to inherit the land, he chooses to give it to others. When the people hear this they cry out to Jesus, “May this never be!” This is the point at which the parable and real life part ways. Jesus would be killed like the son in the parable. But the heir did not stay dead. On the third day, the Son came back to life. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. He pleads to his father to forgive those who put him to death. Because Jesus paid for our sins, the righteous Father's justice has been satisfied. He welcomes people into his kingdom, not as tenant farmers but as members of his family. We are coheirs with Christ, and we work in his kingdom to bear the fruit of good works for others to enjoy.

After telling the parable Jesus seems to give a final warning: “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” This seems to be a no-win situation. Yet Isaiah says that Jesus was crushed in our place. Jesus will never fall on us to crush us. Rather, he is the rock on which we take our stand. In time of need we fall before him, we throw ourselves upon him with broken and contrite hearts, humbling clinging to him for support. It is then that he lifts us up to serve him in joy and peace. God bless us as we share his love with others! Amen.