

Sermon Outline

3. Receive God's gifts; stop stealing his harvest!
2. Respect God's Son; stop murdering him!
1. Rejoice at the resurrection harvest to come; stop mourning Jesus!

Jesus Has Readied You for God's Harvest Day!

Sermon

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew the twenty-first chapter verses thirty-three through forty-six.

Boys and girls I pray that you are doing well today. Have you ever borrowed something? You share toys, sometimes food, clothing. But when you make bad choices, what happens? Stuff gets taken away because what you have ultimately belongs to dad and mom. The same is true of us and God. Everything we have is ultimately God's. When we make bad choices, sometimes things get taken away. Jesus tells us a parable today. He draws from a story that Isaiah told seven hundred years before Jesus. Jesus retold it with a twist to Jerusalem's leaders. This old, old parable is not mere history. Jesus tells us our own story.

"Hear another parable" (v 33). Listen with me again. Do you see what God has done to create us, to sustain us? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

3.

"There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard" (v 33). Deliberately, for each of us, the Lord rooted this earth. Tenderly, he planted so that his prized people have joyful wine! Then the master put a fence around his vineyard. The Lord's teaching encircles us. God's good Word protects us from the jungle out there. "And [the master] dug a winepress." Every good drop he will squeeze out. The Lord's mouth waters for his scrumptious fruit! "And [the master] built a tower." From the watchtower, his high place, standing up high on God's Word, oversee the big picture. God did everything to make his vineyard fruitful.

"And [the master] leased [his vineyard] to tenants" (v 33). He's eager for us to benefit from his work. The good Lord always delights that his gifts be received and used and shared. His giving and giving and giving rippling out makes sense, since he is the giver of every good gift.

“When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit” (v 34). What goodly share would the grateful tenants gladly return to their generous master? Rightfully, their lord was due every last grape.

Whoa! Does this make any sense? “The tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them” (vv 35–36). This happened! The owner sent his servants in two groups. Bible scholars call them the “former prophets” and the “latter prophets.” What happened to them? So many stories—all tell the same. Jeremiah they beat and imprisoned. The great Isaiah himself, the story goes, they stuck into a hollowed tree trunk and sawed in two! Zechariah they stoned to death even in the Lord’s temple courtyard. Then the greatest of the Lord’s servants, John the Baptizer? They lopped off his head.

Why? Greed! In our world today, we see conflicts between landlords and renters. In Jesus’ day, many of his fellow Jews were poor, chafed at working fields owned by wealthy Romans, pagans. Jesus’ story suggests a darker plot. These tenants schemed to take as their own what was only loaned to them. They conspire to make themselves the master, to self-deify!

Could Jesus be describing us? Are we so zealous to protect “our” turf? When God, by the people God puts in our lives, calls on us to share what we’ve worked for? “That’s mine! My time! My talent! My money! That’s my living, my life!” Would we take as our own what’s only been loaned to us? Would you say “that’s mine!” about what your hand can hold only for this day?

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father,” James 1:17 reminds us. “What do you have that you did not receive?” Paul wonders (1 Cor 4:7). Time and again, we do not use God’s gifts as he desires. We close our ears to his “collectors.” If they take leave of us “beaten,” well, “who do they think they are to ask for what’s mine?”! Given all the harvest that our Lord lavishes on us, does the grape then taste in our mouth sour, a gripe? Can you live so selfishly?

Receive God’s gifts; stop stealing his harvest!

2.

What more can the good Lord do? “Finally [the master] sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son’” (v 37). Was the owner really so stupid!? “They will respect my son.” Unarmed?! God not only knew his Son would die, God purposed his Son’s death. Unbelievable. The true picture of God’s patience, God’s grace.

“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” (vv 38–39). Why would killing the son give them the inheritance? They figure, “The Owner never comes. We got away with killing his messengers. Now the old fool must be dead. If he’s survived by no son, then the squatters become the heirs!” Jesus tells this story on a Tuesday. Three days later, on Friday, his hearers took Jesus, threw him out of Jerusalem, and killed him.

In Jesus’ parable, the tenant farmers kill the son precisely because he is the son. High priest Caiaphas and his conniving crew, in twisted alliance with the pompous Pharisees—did they have any idea? “Jesus, we did not know you as the Son of God. If only we had known!” Jesus insisted, “My words and my works tell the truth about who I am” (cf Jn 10:25). Old Israel’s leaders did know Jesus. “He claims to be the Son of God” (cf Lk 22:70; Jn 19:7). Jesus’ truth was their murder charge! Shocking!

What about us? Do we know Jesus? You hear the Son of God’s Word preached to you. You see the Son of God’s work for you. (*Point to the altar’s cross and Communionware.*) Still, “I’m tired of being always accountable. Am I just ‘renting’ my life? How I’d love to be the master of my domain, finally free!” We want to be our own “god.” Jesus’ parable unmasks in our heart the same damnable desire that gripped old Israel’s leaders. We kill the Son, the heir!

Tell me, “I don’t want to throw Jesus out of my life. I’m no killer”? Jesus laughs. “Your sin nailed me!” We moan, “I did the work. The fruit is my own!” So we refuse to give over what the sister and brother need from us. We claim, “It’s my life. I’ve earned it!” So we reject him who claims us as his own.

Respect God’s Son; stop murdering him!

1.

Jesus asks, “When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those [killer] tenants?” (v 40). Is not this a question of simple justice? Even the accused know justice. The vineyard owner “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” (v 41).

What do we confess? Do all our sins justly deserve nothing but God’s punishment, now and forever? We confess and admit that we have earned present and eternal punishment.

The punishment your sin deserves, temporal and eternal punishment, God will deliver. In fact, all of damnation's dreadful sting God already has doled out once and for all at Jesus' cross. It is finished.

Jesus reminds us killers what God had long promised. He quotes the beautiful poetry of Psalm 118: "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" (v 42).

Man's rejection of the stone gets overturned by God's construction. Jesus' first hearers threw Jesus out of their temple. God says, "Great! I'm building the new temple. This stone is just the cornerstone needed." Resurrection is "marvelous" to believers. What Jesus finished 2,000 years ago is our forgiveness today, our new life forever.

Our day-after-day grief over our sin at last God kills. Hearts torn, we must confess, "We have crucified the Christ!" But God puts a new song in our mouth.

Yes, Jesus warns the faithless. "The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him" (v 44). Anyone who trips over Jesus the stumbling stone will be shattered. Anyone on whom Jesus the rock falls will be squashed. No one survives Jesus.

Many would make the master's vineyard their own. They would be their own gods, miserly and miserable. But God writes a new story. Jesus promises, "I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" (v 43).

The God who rules over all once chose old Israel to be his blessing to all the rest of us. Many did welcome him. They shared his fruit. Yet God's people did kill his prophets, even crucified his Son.

Today, the God overall has chosen us, his Jewish and Gentile "new Israel" (cf Gal 6:16), to be his blessing to all people. Our sin, too, crucified Jesus. The Son has risen to life again! Will you and I welcome him? Will we share his fruit?

Rejoice at the resurrection harvest to come! Today is our day to "produce the fruits" of God's vineyard. Not that we can create a single grape. But we can sink roots deep into Jesus' love for us. Taking the place of us "wretches," Jesus himself died the "miserable death." Here he comes now. He pours down our throat the fruit of the vine, his own blood, his forgiveness as the resurrected Son. He means for us to drink deeply. Be filled with his Spirit. Be abundantly

alive with the joy of the divine wine. Let us have no more sour grapes, for Jesus Has Readied You for God's Harvest Day by His death and resurrection from the dead.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.