
13th Sunday after Pentecost 2020

1 Corinthians 16:13-24 & Matthew 21:33-42

God created the universe. We are the stewards whom God has placed to care for the universe. This fact means that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" are not ours. By trying to possess what is not ours, is a sin. Not that God wants to withhold anything from us. He wants to help us avoid the false allure of riches. "Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf "(Proverbs 11: 28).

The parable in our Gospel reading today shows how the tenants deliberately fell into sin. Sin is intentionally going against God's will expressed in the ten commandments. The tenants in this story are deliberately disobedient to the landowner, and he will punish them. (Matthew 21: 33-43)

The parable begins with everything going so well on an ordinary day in Roman-occupied Palestine. A landowner established a vineyard, had it fenced, built a winepress, and erected a watchtower. Then he rented it out. The tenants were to manage the vineyard's productivity and pay rent to the landowner with a share of the produce. Everything was going fine until the tenants got greedy. That's when things started falling apart. When the owner's aides came to collect the rent, the tenants attacked them, beat them, and even killed one. The landowner was unhappy with the outcome but stifled his anger. He sent a second group of his assistants to collect the rent. These men were treated even worse than the first group. Instead of seeking revenge by sending in the police to arrest the tenants, he sends his son for the rent. He thinks the tenants will respect his owner's son. But this did not happen. By some absurd logic, they felt that they would get the son's inheritance by killing the son. And so, they kill the son.

Jesus asks his audience, the chief priests, and elders, "Now when the vineyard owner comes, what will he do to those tenants?" The answer is: "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at harvest time" (Mt 21: 41). The chief priests and elders probably saw themselves in the role of the landowner. They could own the land and have it managed by servants. If the servants become greedy, the chief priests and elders, as victims, would have them punished.

As Christians, we see the landowner in this parable as God, the Temple leaders as the evil tenants. We see them taking advantage of God and taking the fruits of His bond with Israel. In this allegory, the groups of servants are Israel's prophets and Jesus as the son. We are the other tenants who will receive the vineyard after it is taken from the leaders who have not managed it well (Isaiah 5: 1-7).

Those words Jesus spoke then apply equally to us. We are the tenants of this world and are responsible for it. We are to take care of it, till the soil, raise the crops and care for all the things. We are accountable for the environment and care for the animals, the birds, and the fish in the oceans. He has put all things in our care, and we are to give Him His share of what He has given each of us personally. We must also look after each other as a family.

So, what kind of tenants are we? What will happen when He comes to collect? I hope we will hear Him say, "well done my good and faithful servant." But there may be some who will fall short of God's expectations. Today, many are more concerned with their own

needs, wants and desires. Their sole purpose is to take care only of themselves and their immediate family. If there is any left, after taxes, they give some to the church. They may even have a favourite charity to which they occasionally contribute a few dollars, but only if it is tax-deductible. So, they feel that they've done their part. But have they? Here is an excellent example of a lax steward.

Once, a man said, "If I had some extra money, I'd give it to God, but I have just enough to support myself and my family." And the same man said, "If I had some extra time, I'd give it to God, but every minute is taken up with my job, my family, my clubs, and my hobbies." And the same man said, "If I had a talent I'd give it to God, but I have no lovely voice; I have no special skill; I've never been able to lead a group; I can't think cleverly or quickly, the way I should."

And God was touched, and although it was unlike him, God gave that man money, time, and a glorious talent. And then He waited, and waited, and waited. And then after a while, He shrugged His shoulders, and He took all those things right back from the man, the money, the time and the glorious talent. After a while, the man sighed and said, "If I only had some of that money back, I'd give it to God. If I only had some of that time, I'd give it to God. If I could only rediscover that glorious talent, I'd give it to God."

And God said, "Oh, shut up."

And the man told some of his friends, "You know, I'm not so sure that I believe in God anymore." (God is No Fool, 1969, Abingdon Press.)

Stewardship means being good managers of the resources God has given us. God has given each of us unique gifts and talents to use for all humanity's welfare. We must consider not only our own needs and desires but those of other people and future generations. We realize that none of us is a self-made person, and all that we own comes from God and should flow from us to others. We appreciate all that we receive: the natural, societal, and financial resources handed down. If we know our legacy, we must use our talents and gifts for God's greater glory.

Amen!