

2022-04-10 ... Palm Sunday Evensong Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Isaiah 5: 1-7; Luke 20: 9-19

The church leaders heard Jesus tell the story of the vineyard tenants and knew he was telling it about them. I wonder whether you heard it speak to you personally or whether you just heard it as a bit of history?

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell this story with very little difference and they place it at the same moment in Jesus's life. It comes after the Palm Sunday procession, Jesus is speaking in the Temple in Jerusalem having not long before thrown the tables about and cracked a whip because of the crooked trading going on. He is teaching and answering questions and it seems to be open knowledge, at least between Jesus and the leaders, that the leaders are trying to trip Jesus into blasphemy to give them an excuse to have him killed.

Jesus is riffing on the song of rebuke in Isaiah that we also heard, a cautionary tale that we can assume his hearers were familiar with.

Who could deny or object to the conclusion that the landowner would throw out the murderous tenants and put new tenants in place. And yet the onlookers seem shocked by it. It seems they too understand the significance of this contemporary version of the story and see that they might be about to witness the end of their faith picture.

There is a further timely reference to the Hebrew Scriptures in the mention of the cornerstone. The crowds who cheered Jesus into Jerusalem on his donkey called 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord', quoting **verse 26 of Psalm 118. Verse 22 of that same psalm is: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone'**. The irony is that then the cornerstone was Israel. Now the Israelites are the ones doing the rejecting!

The sentence about the stone crushing those who stumble on it or on whom it falls is curious and isn't part of the psalm.

I'd like to interpret the 'destruction' of the bad tenants as referring to an humiliation process, stripping them of their controlling influence, and of course being duly punished for their crimes; and the crushing of the stone as being something similar – but you may think I'm being too soft. It remains true, however, that God continues to hold out his hand to the rebellious, ready to hear their 'sorry'.

My opening question was whether or not you heard a personal message in the reading.

What behaviour might Jesus warn us of?

I'm going to offer you some homework... to read the remainder of Isaiah chapter 5, subtitled in one translation as 'a series of divine complaints' where you will find what happens to 'those who never give a thought to the plan of the Lord', 'those who are so wise – in their own opinion' and 'those who have rejected the instruction of the Lord' At the very least, as is much of Isaiah, it is good poetry but maybe you will find yourself lurking in there!!