

2026-10-04 ... 10am Service Sermon ... Revd Bev Jameson

Isaiah 5.1-7; Matthew 21.33-end; Philippians 3.4-14

PRAYER

Father may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us into the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord - Amen

SERMON

My parents died when I was in my early twenties and it was my friends Mike and Barbara who sort of absorbed me into their family. Mike's Dad Peter was a keen wine maker and I have fallen foul of his gooseberry white wine on more than one occasion. Its tastes lovely but before you know it your knees stopped working and you can't stand up. He has grown quite a mammoth grape vine around the front of his house from which he has won first prizes in the Aberdeen Show. He constantly tends it as it's not easy growing grapes in the Staffordshire Moorlands and the grapes have to be picked before the wasps get them. Occasionally the wasps win as Mike discovered as he was picking the grapes after we returned from holiday in Malta. I guess not many of us grow grapes or really understand the care required but most people 2000 years ago would have when listening to the Parable in our NT reading this morning, BUT there is more going on than meets the eye.

Jesus often refers to and make reference to *scripture* and the only *scripture* at that time was our OT and although we can glean some understanding of what the NT is talking about there is a richness and depth we miss if we overlook those links. **Our gospel reading is one such passage this morning.** Jesus tells a parable of a farmer who planted a vineyard built a hedge around it, dug a wine press and built a tower. This is a direct reference to *Isaiah 5.1-7* where God built a vineyard, cleared it of stones, built a wine press and a watch tower God expected it to yield grapes but it yielded wild grapes (poor quality grapes). Most people (and certainly chief priests and Pharisees listening to Jesus) would know this scripture and make a link to the beginning of Jesus story. This parable is about God and his disappointment in the people of Jerusalem and the people of Judah who did not care for his vineyard and did not produce good fruit.

The tenants fail to pay the landlord the fixed proportion of their produce as they're obliged to do. This in itself is enough for the landlord (God) to replace them, but the landlord (God) send servants (God sent Prophets) to the tenants to encourage them to do better, but they beat and kill the servants. Finally the landlord (God) sends his son who is also beaten and killed which of course we see as a reference to Jesus' own fate. People may have made that connection later after the events of Easter but that day maybe not.

In a nutshell this parable is a sharp criticism of Israel's failure to live up to God's expectations, but the focus here was not so much on Israel as a whole but on the leaders, the chief priests and Pharisees. They who knew their scripture so well would see this as an insult to them personally. They knew that Isaiah reading and they knew

that God destroyed that vineyard, destroyed and abandoned the people of Israel and Judah because of their bad behaviour. The Chief priests and Pharisees could now also only expect a wretched end as described in Isaiah. You can just imagine the chief priests and Pharisees spitting feathers at such a comparison. No wonder they were plotting to remove, to destroy this itinerant rabbi from Nazareth.

Then Jesus refers to quotes *Psalms 118.22-23* ***The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.***

The one rejected by Israel's leaders will be the one for the place of the highest honour. Those who manage the vineyard (the Chief Priests and Pharisees who manage the Jewish religion and Jewish people) are not seen to be responsible. So someone else will take their place. Another insult and another OT link the Chief Priests and Pharisees would have regarded as a personal insult.

Jesus refers to the kingdom of God being taken away from them and given to people who produce fruit. This suggests not only the leadership but the very composition of the people of God would change, i.e. perhaps inferring not just Jews but Gentiles too, a theme Paul picks up in his letter to the Philippians.

Paul's desire is to be accepted not by following the Jewish religious laws but by the righteousness which is God's gift given simply by believing in Jesus Christ regardless of who you are, whatever social standing, background or previous faith (Jewish, Gentile) or no faith at all. Everything else counts as nothing compared to this. He urges the church in Philippi to strive to become more like Christ and follow him more dearly.

So what does this mean for us? Well, I guess Paul's advice is something we should all follow – to accept the church of Christ is made up of people with very different social standing and backgrounds. That those of faith or no faith are welcome because all that is required is that we believe and follow Jesus' teaching to love one another, to love our neighbour and to follow Jesus' values not the world's values. We are also all tenants in God's vineyard managing that vineyard for God being responsible and taking care of our world producing fruit in other words being active in our faith, managing the vineyard by the way we behave, our attitudes and values being brave enough to speak of what Jesus has done in our life and what he can do in the life of others, growing the vineyard, growing the kingdom of Jesus Christ our lord and saviour. To be the very best of ourselves to be proactive for him and to love him more dearly this day and every day.

AMEN