

# “Maybe They’ll Respect Him!”

Text: Luke 20:9-19 INI Lent 5 Wayzata 3/21/10

Problems between labor and management existed even at the time of Jesus. It seems that it’s nothing new. It was share croppers and farm owners. In every negotiation session there is always the possibility of one last plea. Most of the disputes that we see today are depicted as owners being the bad guys who won’t help out the little guys, the workers. Jesus told the story in our Gospel for today that has to do with just such a relationship. Only in this one it’s labor who is doing the dirty work to management.

Some parables of Jesus were difficult to understand. His disciple would ask Him to explain what that story meant. This parable is crystal clear to the hearers. For us it might be a little obscure. When the Owner, God, sends His Son to collect the rent the tenants kill him.

The servants in this story are the prophets. Amos, prophet of God, long ago called the prophets, God’s servants. The audience Jesus spoke to was well aware of that. The vineyard was a familiar picture of Israel too. Isaiah used it. It returns in the New Testament.

The tenants run it for the owner need to pay rent with part of the crop. They refuse and mistreat the owner’s servants who come to collect, first one, then another, finally a third. The servants are the prophets. It seems that people don’t always want to hear the message from God’s Word, especially if it is one of repentance.

The Owner’s Son comes. The tenants refuse Him and kill Him. Jesus tries to help His own people recognize their Father is still sending them a message of love. Listen! This parable is pointed toward those who felt they were righteous in themselves. Religious people are often the hardest to convince they need to repent. It’s their self righteousness.

Last Sunday Jesus told the parable of the Waiting Father. Return from that far country of rebellion and ignoring your Father, He’s there waiting for you. This story is different and a little bit harsher but the goal is the same. Return to the Father, believe the Son whom He sent. Repent of your reliance on self, your rebellion against God’s love and come to the Father.

Let’s not just condemn Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day and miss the point of this parable for us. Israel as the vineyard of the Lord and the tenants the leaders of His people that has ramifications for us today. We are the spiritual Israel.

We are the vineyard of the Lord and the tenants are the leaders in the Lord’s church today. The point is the patience of the Owner and the love and obedience of the Son willing to go to such delusional people so violence prone. It would not matter who the chosen people were, when God sent His Son to them the results would have been the same. I’m not fatalistic, but it’s human nature.

Even today, if Jesus walked the earth as a real man, preach the same message: repent you have strayed from the real God, give up self righteousness and rely on God’s mercy people would kill him. Many people today do not have Jesus as the capstone of their life. He remains the stone they discard. None the less He is still who He is.

Original sin does strange things to distort our thinking. It makes the tenant deluded to think if they murder the Son and Heir they will own the vineyard. Ownership will always be God’s. The same is true in our life. Sin fails to give God His proper place in our life. Sin wants to exert and usurp power that belongs to God.

Get rid of the Son. Discard Him as useless. Human society thinks He is. But He remains the capstone, who holds everything in place in our lives and the universe. Throw Him out and we become throw backs to our original selves, maliciously self centered - no one counts but me, how I feel, what I want. Once we become self centered all we seek is our own pleasure. This pleasure principle leads otherwise intelligent people to corrupt others for their own pleasure.

It’s why children are exploited and sexually molested, people try to seduce one another, drugs are sold to the unsuspecting, people are bilked out of their money. Once a person becomes addicted only to finding pleasure for themselves, they want to control everyone around them so they can continue to receive the pleasure they crave. The reason for control is that it has to be what I want the way I want it.

They often get it by bullying others around them, manipulating them, verbally and even physically abusing them. They have remorse, but only when they are caught red handed doing something wrong. In this deluded

scenario its wrong only if you get caught. Therefore no one really is guilty when there's no such thing as right or wrong without Jesus as the capstone. We wonder why society is anti-life, anti-child, and anti-elderly. It's because society has become anti-Christian. How can we blame other people for what we not only tolerate but also participate in, at least to one degree or another?

The warning is clear. God faces us with Law, don't see everyone else in that mirror, see yourself. What have I done? The tragedy of this story is that those who needed to recognize God's moment of grace, when it came to them again and again and again, refused.

They wanted to kill Jesus. Stop His teaching it bothers our principle of self centeredness, self righteousness. We are the chosen, we are the center of the universe, we are all important. It's our thoughts, our ideas, our plans. Not God's. We own ourselves and our destiny. Come let us kill the Heir, then our ownership will be complete.

What fantasy, what delusion, what fatally flawed logic! While God let these tenants alone there comes a time when He returns and calls them to account for all that has been in their charge.

He will come. He will take that vineyard away and give it to others. They will be crushed by the consequences. There are consequences to self centeredness here. They make life miserable and unhappy. There are eternal consequences also.

Law always brings consequences, in our personal or corporate life. It may seem that evil is winning. It may seem that way in every day society as we view the world, as we view God's church and often what happens in it. But evil does not win. It seems evil is on the throne and good on the gallows. Good will win. It doesn't sound humanly possible and it isn't. It follows God's plan, His patience, His love, His victory.

That's why more than anything else we rely on the patience of our loving God. More than anything else we rely on the willingness of His Beloved Son to go into the vineyard and be put to death. More than anything else we rely on His forgiveness. It cleanses us. It breaks the chain of self centeredness, self righteousness by killing our Old Adam.

We come to His Sacrament of His body and blood in with and under the bread and wine to receive His forgiveness, to bring our sins to the cross, nailing them there with Him, killing their power over us to completely control and lead us to death. No one else offers us that, no other religion assures that, there is None like Him. He comes into His vineyard offering forgiveness. Bring your sins to Him. Receive His forgiveness, live with His love. Amen.