

## We're All The Forgiven-Wicked Tenants

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the beloved Son of God who came to give His life for you. Amen.

Today we have just heard the last parable Jesus told. This story about the Vineyard is often called the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. (SLIDE) The truth is this story is actually an allegory rather than a Parable. In an allegory all the characters and places stand for or represent something else. Most scholars say that the Vineyard represents Israel. God is the owner and creator of the Vineyard and the religious leaders are the wicked tenants. The prophets are the Servants sent by the owner to collect the owner's portion of the profit from the crops. Of course, Jesus is the Son of the owner. In this allegory, Jesus says the wicked tenants killed the servants and ultimately the owner's son as well. I had never studied the fates of the major prophets from the Old Testament. Some of their fates are recorded in the Bible, while others are written down in other ancient documents. For example, several sources record that Isaiah was tied up and put into a hollow tree. Once inside the tree the evil King Manasseh ordered the tree to be sawed in half, with Isaiah inside. Jeremiah, who regularly called the religious leaders to give up their idols, stop catering to the King and return the temple to worship only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For his efforts the priests sought to kill him many times. Once they threw him into a huge sewer to die. (SLIDE) His death is not recorded in the Bible, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church Father named Tertullian, recorded

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that Jeremiah was eventually stoned to death. I could go on, but I think you get the point. God's people have rejected the messengers God sent for a very long time.

This story takes place, as best we can tell, on Wednesday of the first Holy Week. As we read through the Gospel of Mark during this Lenten Season we're a bit out of order. (SLIDE) By the time Jesus sits down and has this conversation with the religious leaders, He's already made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the 1<sup>st</sup> Palm Sunday. On the following Monday Jesus condemned the Fig Tree because it had no fruit as another allegory against the Temple System in Jerusalem. (SLIDE) Then Jesus went to the Temple and found all the corrupt money changers selling animals for the people to purchase and then offer as their sacrifice for their sins. Jesus famously overturned the tables, chased the merchants out, and rebuked them for failing to use God's House as a House for Prayer. The next day as they passed by that same tree, it was dead. (SLIDE)

After all that activity Jesus tells this allegory and the religious leaders get his point. They're infuriated and want to kill him right then and there, but of course they fear the crowds who haven't yet turned on Jesus. So, instead, they try one last time to trip Jesus up. They ask him a question they think has no good answer. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? (SLIDE) In their minds, it's a yes or no answer. It's black and white and there's no room for any gray area. If Jesus says no, then he'll be in trouble with the Roman Tax Man. If he says yes, then he's in cahoots

## We're All The Forgiven-Wicked Tenants

with the Romans and they can use that against him with the people who despise the Roman Rulers. How foolish we are when we try to outsmart The Lord.

The Lord sent many prophets to the leaders and the people of Israel. The prophets call the people to repentance and a restored relationship with God. The leaders and the people refused the prophets' call to repentance. This happened over and over again in the history of God's Chosen people. We're no different today. We're not perfect people. Martin Luther said we are "at the same time sinners and saints." (SLIDE) We're afflicted by greed, lust, hate, and hardened hearts, because it is part of our human nature, but at the same time, we have the invitation and the opportunity to confess our sin, turn from our evil ways, and receive God's forgiveness. Jesus said he came to call sinners to repent. After telling them this story about the wicked tenants, He asked the chief priests what they thought the landowner would do when he returned. It was the common consensus that he would destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Yes, the temple was destroyed, just as Jesus had condemned that fig tree for not producing any fruit, the Temple was destroyed in the year 70 AD for the exact same reason. The religious leaders hoarded the blessings of God for themselves. They grew rich on the backs of widows and orphans. Yet, instead of the annihilation of the tenants, God the Father sent his Son. Through Jesus' life, death,

## We're All The Forgiven-Wicked Tenants

and resurrection he offers to all people the forgiveness of sin, a new life, and a new relationship with God, making us both sinners and saints at the same time.

Today we got to witness the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of both Reece and Lylah as they received all the riches of God's Grace and Mercy. Because God loved each of them, and all of us who are Baptized, we're now able to walk as new creatures. Because the Holy Spirit is poured out onto the Baptized and now lives inside of us, our sin is constantly being forgiven, every nano-second of every day. In "Church" talk we call that Sanctification. It means the Baptized are covered with a sort of Holy Spirit Teflon that coats us so that our sin doesn't stick to us. We are free from the bondage to sin, death, and the devil!

What does that mean in real life? Saint Paul famously asked if we're now free to sin even more because we know it doesn't stick. He simply answered No way! But let's think this through. If the wages of sin is death, then we all must still die, but when we receive the gift of Baptism we die right then and there to sin. We're reborn, children of God. What a great gift! I told Reece this week that even if he believes he made the decision to be Baptized, the truth is that he finally caught on to what the Holy Spirit had been doing and working in his life. His "decision" to be Baptized is the response to the Holy Spirit's movement and calling in his life. The question for all of us as we consider our own Baptism is what difference does it make in our lives. Do we leave the font and return to our old

## We're All The Forgiven-Wicked Tenants

ways or do we respond to God's love with repentance and continue to repent each and every day. When Jesus called sinners to repent, he meant for our whole lives to be lived in repentance, not just a one time occurrence.

When Jesus says to give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, but give to God what belongs to God, it's a reminder to all of us, whose we are. Jesus redeemed us when he paid the price for human sin. The wages of sin is and always will be death, but the good news for us is that Jesus opened the graves of all the saints and we need not fear the day of judgment. Forgiveness of sin isn't a license to continue living in sin, but a chance to change, to remember that we are each created in the image of God.

This Lenten season is a time for us to become aware of our sin, but also aware of God's forgiveness and his invitation to walk in a new life. May we all remember that we are Baptized saints and children of our heavenly Father. Amen.