

18th Sunday after Pentecost

October 4, 2020

Collect: ALMIGHTY AND EVERLASTING GOD, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve. Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:7-14

Philippians 3:4b-14

Matthew 21:33-46

Sermon: In today's Old Testament lesson and the Gospel we are treated to stories about vineyards being used as symbols,

In the Old Testament lesson a prophet speaks concerning God's care of the vineyard which in this case is Israel. The prophet said God picked out the most fertile soil for planting. He cleared the land of stones, tilled the soil and planted his choice vines. He built a watchtower in the middle of the vineyard and hewed out a wine vat for pressing the juice out of the grapes.

The prophet is saying that God took real good care of the people of Israel. He chose a site, removed it of any offending obstacles and showing his mercy and love he put the people of Israel there. He watched over them ensuring that no harm would come to them.

He expected good grapes to grow in this vineyard, instead wild grapes grew. Instead of righteous people living in Jerusalem and Judah who dealt justice, there is bloodshed and people are crying out in anguish.

God is disappointed, he had sent the prophet to guide and advise the people of what he wanted from them and how they should behave and live. The watchtower is a symbol for the prophets being there among the people. It is their job to warn the people when they are being disobedient, to correct them in their wrongdoings and to speak the word of God as instruction to them.

God speaks that he had done his very best for the people of Israel and he asks what more could he have done.

He decides that he will withdraw his care, he will let his people live in a wasteland. Now, hard times and problems will come to them. To ensure that they suffer his wrath, there will be drought, no rain shall fall. There will be no chance of Israel prospering. God will turn his back on them and not listen to them in their anguish.

In the Gospel story about the vineyard, a landowner (God) had planted a vineyard and to ensure its' safety and to keep out those who may have wanted cause mischief. He built a hedge around it, his love and mercy. He also built a watchtower so that wrong doing could be spotted and monitored.

He leased the vineyard to tenants and he went to another country.

When it was time to harvest the grapes, the landowner sent his servant to collect what was due him. Instead of paying what was due, the tenants, beat, stoned and killed another of the servants. Again, the landowner sent ever more servants perhaps they would be safe because of their large number. Yet the tenants treated these servants the same way.

The landowner decided to send his son, surely, they would respect his son and do what was right. But when the tenants saw the son, they decided to kill the son thinking they could gain ownership of the vineyard.

Now in this story the vineyard is the chosen people, Israel. The servants are the prophets speaking the word of God. The tenants are the Jewish religious leaders and the son of the landowner is Jesus the son of God.

Jesus is standing in the temple having a terse conversation with the chief priests and elders of the people, Just the day before Jesus had cleansed the temple, running the money changers and the animal sales persons out of the temple. Jesus had accused them of turning the house of prayer into a swap

meet. Jesus had come back to the temple the next day and this conversation takes place.

After he had told his story, and before the authorities recognized that the story was about them. Jesus asked them what did they think the landowner would do when he came to the vineyard. Quickly they replied that the landowner would put the wretched tenants to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to someone else who would do right at harvest time.

They quickly saw the injustice and indicted the wrong doers. And, of course that may have been the right thing to do.

Jesus asked them if they had read the scripture that told about the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone. This was a stone set at the corner of a building to tie two walls together and strengthen them. It is used as a symbol of strength and prominence in the Bible.

Jesus goes on to tell the religious leaders they are wrong in what they are teaching. They are teaching more about discipline, obey the law, do what is expected from the Torah (the law) and the Laws of Moses (the 10 Commandments).

Jesus tells them that there needs to be a change and new concepts need to be taught. It will be the Lord's doing but a change will come and more people will be prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps Jesus is talking about love and respect for others plus faith, a belief in God and being righteous, doing the right things. This is certainly what he taught.

The chief priest and the religious authorities were angry because Jesus dressed them down and, in a way, said what they were teaching was unproductive. It was not what the people needed to prepare them for the kingdom of God.

They would liked to have arrested him but they were afraid of what the people might do. The people regarded him as a prophet, a man speaking the word of God,

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