

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Patient Vineyard Owner"

Scripture: Mark 12:1-12, Isaiah 5:1-7

Opening Hymn: Come, let us to the Lord our God 194

Closing Hymn: Spirit of God, descend upon my heart 382

Children's Hymn: Jesus, remember me 206

Choruses: 10,000 reason (bless the Lord)

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Have you ever been a tenant?

Have you ever rented an apartment?

If so, you probably have a story about one of your landlords.

Maybe someone who was too friendly.

Or maybe someone who wasn't very diligent.

Who never got around to fixing the doorbell

Or replacing the leaking facet.

Have you ever been a landlord?

Have you ever rented out property?

If so, you probably have story about one of your tenants.

Maybe someone threw noisy parties,

Whose 'beater' left oil stains on the road in front of your house.

One man "rented a three-bedroom house in Kingston  
to a couple and their grown son in late 2014."

In his own words they "interviewed well"  
and seemed like "really nice people."

But as the story goes "things went south from there..."

The family kept rabbits, chickens, pigeons and livestock--  
a goat, according to neighbours--  
[all] inside the home....

The family used buckets of water to clean the floors  
and swept dirt, garbage and animal feces down the heating vents...

The house had also been “grease bombed,”  
which involves placing a piece of fatty meat in the oven,  
turning the heat to high and leaving the door slightly ajar,  
destroying the walls...

The family also left behind stacks of overdue bills  
for thousands of dollars, including \$1,400 for utilities,  
\$1,700 for propane, and \$2,000 for telephone and Internet.”

“In the aftermath, the livid landlord  
removed a staggering nine tons of garbage--  
[and after two months was] still cleaning up the disaster...”<sup>i</sup>

Quite the wicked tenants.

And yet they’ve got nothing on those tenants  
We’ve heard about today.

Jesus tells a story about a developer  
who sets up a new vineyard and rents it out.

But when he sends his property manager over  
To collect the lease payment,  
they beat the man up.

When the developer sends another associate  
They actually kill the representative.  
They end up killing a lot of people  
They eventually kill the developer's own son.

What a bunch of thugs.

Now this isn't a news story, this is a parable.  
This is a tale which illustrates a spiritual lesson.

From the very outset it is clear  
That the parable is functioning as a sort of allegory.  
We can recognise this  
As soon as we hear about the vineyard.

Talking about a 'vineyard'  
Was shorthand to speak about the nation of Israel.

As our Old Testament reading tell us:  
"The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel,  
and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in."<sup>ii</sup>

Understanding that Israel is the vineyard  
Gives us insight into the other characters in the parable.  
The owner of the vineyard is the Lord.  
The tenants are the nation's religious leaders.

Those servants who come to collect rent are the prophets.  
And the son who is murdered and tossed out like garbage  
is Jesus himself.

In the form of a parable Jesus recounts the history of Israel  
And foretells what will happen to him.

Now in Isaiah 5 the main concern was a fruitless vineyard,  
But in Jesus's retelling the problem is with the tenants,  
The religious leaders.<sup>iii</sup>

We are told that his listeners, the religious leaders,  
Understood that "Jesus had spoken the parable against them."<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus is accusing them of using their position of leadership  
For their own personal benefit,  
All the while ignoring the very God  
They were supposed to represent.

But while Jesus makes an indictment against these leaders  
Jesus also addresses the character of God.

You might think God's character is summed up in the climactic dark line:  
"What then will the owner of the vineyard do?  
He will come and KILL those tenants  
And give the vineyard to others."<sup>v</sup>

But to dismiss this as another instance of that  
Always angry, vindictive, Old Testament of God,  
Is to not heard the story.

If you listen carefully you will see a picture painted  
Of a God who loves his church,  
Longs to see repentance,  
and is determined to claim what is his own.

God loves his church.

This is maybe not so obvious as can be seen in Isaiah.  
That parable, that allegory in Isaiah  
Is set out as a love song.

It describes the tender nurture  
The vintner has for the vineyard,  
That God has for Israel and the church.

Jesus doesn't wax so poetically in his parable,  
And yet the same careful nurture can be observed.

Not only are the vines planted but they are also protected  
With a wall and a watchtower.

And when the landowner has trouble with those tenants,  
He doesn't walk away from his investment,  
but is determined to hold on to it,  
Even when it costs him the life of his servants.  
Event when it costs him the life of his son.

Have you ever wondered whether or not God loves his church?  
He loves it so much that he gave his only Son for us.

God loves his church.

God also longs for repentance.

In terms of the story

It just doesn't make sense

That the landowner continues to send servants

After the first one was beaten.

And why would he persist

In sending one after another?

The beatings of the first two are described by Jesus.

Following that we are told about the first murder.

Then Jesus adds "He sent many others..."<sup>vi</sup>

It just doesn't make sense

That the landowner would send so many messengers

To speak to those tenants.

Surely the cost of those servant's lives

Outweighed the money that was owed to him.

But the landowner seems so determined

To get a good response from those tenants.

"Just let me try one more time";

"I can still win them over" he seems to be saying.

God longs for repentance.

Finally, God is determined to claim what is his own.

This ultimately flows out of God's love for that vineyard, his church.

While God is long-suffering,

In the end God won't let the religious leader's arrogance,

Or even God's desire for their repentance,

undermine the health of his vineyard

And God's claiming of it as his own.

What Jesus is telling us here,

Is that the mistreatment of God's people

By their religious leader's won't endure forever.

He won't let them run his church

as their own little kingdoms.

God will call these leaders to account

And replace them with those who serve God's will.

This is good news for those who have been spiritually abused  
by their ministers.

God won't put up with it forever.

This is good news for those fearful

they are missing God's calling

Because the community is living out the private dreams

And ambitions of someone in leadership.

God's goals are what finally matters.

God won't let those goals be thwarted by anyone.

Jesus spoke this parable against the teachers of the law and the elders.  
Jesus spoke this parable against people like me.  
But in a certain sense it is spoke for and against all of us.

God loves his church.  
God longs for our repentance.  
And God will call us all to account.

As someone who takes part in Presbytery,  
The next level of government in the church,  
I sometime see the process of discipline in action.

A church has been struggling for a season.  
What becomes clear after visitations  
Is that there is someone in the congregation  
Who has built their own little kingdom.

There are people whose ownership of the church  
exceeds their authority.

When there are questions about worship styles or aesthetics,  
The use of the church by outsiders, or mission to the neighborhood,  
They put their foot down, they say 'This is my church'  
And then dictate to others the way things should be.

Beware when you hear anyone adamantly declare:  
"This is my church!"

Whoever claims "This is my church is usually off-track.  
Outsiders [Presbytery] will need to come in and clear house.



The fact remains it doesn't matter how long  
or how hard we've worked this vineyard.  
It doesn't matter how much respect we have gained  
Or how many friends we have.

When it comes to the church we are only ever tenants.  
This is Christ's church.

So let us thank God for his love,  
For his desire for our repentance.  
And let us all serve God's will together. Amen

<sup>i</sup> "Slurry of garbage, animal feces among destruction caused by evicted tenants in Kingston Ont. house of horrors" Dec 1, 2016  
<https://torontosun.com/2016/12/01/slurry-of-garbage-animal-feces-among-destruction-caused-by-evicted-tenants-in-kingston-ont-house-of-horrors/wcm/0d7695c1-1ce8-4756-b389-ae96720fee08>

<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah 5:7

<sup>iii</sup> See Lamar Williamson Jr. *Mark* 214

<sup>iv</sup> Mark 12:12 NIV

<sup>v</sup> Mark 12:9 NIV

<sup>vi</sup> Mark 12:5 NIV