

mystery; parables; Christology; God's mercy; sacrament of reconciliation; images of God

Closing Prayer

Yours, O God, is the vineyard and its harvest,
yours the kingdom of justice and peace.
You call your people to tend its growth.

Bless the work entrusted to our hands,
that we may offer you
an abundance of just works,
a rich harvest of peace.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers, Ordinary Time 27, Year A²

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 22.odt • 2020-07-16

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

Proper 22

(Sunday between 2 and 8 October inclusive)

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 5.1-7	The song of the vineyard
Psalms 80.8-16	The vineyard with a broken wall
Philippians 3.4b-14	Paul discounts his heredity in favour of faith, aiming for heaven
Matthew 21.33-46	Parable of the wicked tenants

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Parable of the vineyard

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: ³³Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' ⁴¹They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

⁴²Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realised that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Matthew 21.33-46 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

In Matthew 21.33-46 Matthew has taken over the parable of the vineyard from Mark 12.1-12. That parable tells of the harsh treatment given to Jesus and the harsh treatment given to God's earlier messengers. There are some clear allegorical features: the vineyard is Israel; the tenant farmers are Israel's leaders; the land owner is God; the earlier messengers are the prophets; and the son is Jesus. Other elements have no obvious allegorical significance. Since there seems to be foreknowledge of Jesus' death the parable has possibly been added to since Jesus' time by the Church until it was taken on by Mark.

Matthew has provided the parable with a suitable introduction (21.33a), has simplified the sending of the earlier messengers (21.34, 36), has explained the tenant farmers' plan to seize the inheritance (21.39), and turned the end of the parable into a conversation (21.41-46). The participants in the conversation are identified as the chief priests and Pharisees (21.45). So the parable becomes part of the controversy theme that dominates chapters 21-23. The opponents are forced to draw their own conclusion about their fate (21.41). Matthew's ideas about 'bearing fruit' (3.8,10; 7.16-20; 12.33; 13.8; 21.19) is introduced (21.41, 43). There is also talk of a transfer of authority from one group to another (21.41, 43).

People hearing the parable in the late first century would have been familiar with the idea of the vineyard. Absentee landlords let out their vineyards to sharecroppers who worked the land in exchange for a fee or percentage of the produce. The bulk of the profits belonged to the land owner, who sent agents along from time to time to collect what was

¹ New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

owed to him. The plan of the tenants is to inherit the vineyard for themselves (21.38), which was an illegal and unwise action, as long as the owner remained alive.

The idea of Israel as a vineyard occurs in Isaiah 5.1-7: 'the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel' (Isaiah 5.7). The Isaiah passage makes no mention of tenant farmers. It says that the vineyard will be destroyed (Isaiah 5.5-6), because it has produced wild grapes (Isaiah 5.2).

In its setting in Matthew, the parable shows why Jesus' opponents want to have him killed. The chief priests and Pharisees perceive that the parable applies to them. The parable in Matthew indicates that the *leaders* of the people need to be replaced, as the parable says that the tenant farmers not the vineyard must be replaced.

The theological thrust of the parable is to place the suffering and death of Jesus in line with the mistreatment of God's messengers, the prophets, through the centuries.

Quotations

1

The prayer level of a church never rises any higher than the personal example and passion of the leaders. The quantity and quality of prayer in leadership meetings is the essential indicator of the amount of prayer that will eventually arise among the congregation.

Old paths, new power: awakening your church through prayer and the ministry of the word / Daniel Henderson. 2016

2

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.
Xun Kuang (Chinese Confucian philosopher), c.310 BC – c.235 BC

Related topics

For further study:

Repentance; evangelisation; ministry; social teaching; ecumenism; reign of God; mystery of the church; conversion; discipleship; paschal