

The Lord of the Harvest ***Patiently Seeks Produce***

I'm not much of a gardener. I find no joy in planting and tending to and eventually reaping a harvest from a backyard garden. Maybe my disinterest today comes from childhood afternoons that were spent hoeing rows and pulling weeds and picking beans. I'm not a gardener. But I know many of you are. And you're good at it. And maybe you even enjoy it. I've seen the careful investment good gardeners make. They get good seed. And with the proper light and warmth and water those seeds become seedlings. By the time those plants go into the ground, they are healthy and growing. And once in the ground, the gardener continues to tend and nourish. Pulls weeds. Waters. Covers when it gets too cold. Provides shade if too sunny or hot. I've seen good gardeners take great care and, come harvest time, they take great joy and pride in the vegetables and fruits that are produced.

Now consider the landowner in today's gospel. He took great care and spent much personal effort and resources to plant - not a garden - but a vineyard. And not just a small backyard hobby vineyard, but one that had a winepress and was large enough to need a wall and a watchtower. What a property he had created. And now he was eager to see what kind of fruit this vineyard would produce. He hands his property over to some tenants or caretakers. When harvest time arrives, he sends a delegation to gather up his fruit. And how are his servants received? Can you believe it? Are you surprised by the ingratitude...the brutality...the selfishness? Not just once, but on two separate trips these servants are terribly mistreated.

Of course, you know the point of Jesus' parable. The vineyard is the people of Israel. The people God had so carefully and lovingly chosen...the people God had built a wall around and protected...the people God had fed and nourished...the people God had wanted so badly to just bear fruit. And what did they do? They mistreated his prophets. They grumbled about his gifts. They closed their ears to his Word. Can you believe it? Are you surprised by the ingratitude...the selfishness of the people?

And not just one accidental, moment of weakness...oops, they made one little mistake...but a repeating rejection of God's prophets and his Word and his goodness...again and again. How can we not be surprised by that? And then it hits us...this parable isn't about "those people"...it's about "these people" - you and me.

- Who have been given so much care and so many gifts from our Lord, and yet, we still manage to forget to say thank you...or we complain about his gifts because they aren't the right size or style or amount that we'd prefer.
- Never in the history of the world has it been easier for you and me to have the Word of God proclaimed to us. In an era where we can watch TV and listen to music and manage our facebook and Instagram accounts on our phones - even our watches...so the Word is also that accessible. Opportunities abound. Yet somehow we manage to spend so little time at the feet of our Savior and so much time on our own pet projects. True enough - we're not killing prophets, but what great honor do we bring Jesus, the Great Prophet, when we have a better handle on the story line of Game of Thrones than we do the life events of Jesus?
- Just as in the parable, our God comes to his people and we so badly want to see evidence of a living faith...a growing faith...a faith that produces fruit. He looks for good, but instead he finds evil. He expects and wants attitudes that are kind and contagious and attract people to Christianity; but instead he sees moments of hypocrisy...he sees us giving Christianity a bad name. Or, he sees what others see...very little. Meaning, when others watch us and listen to us and see how we treat others...when they see us shopping or driving or working or out with friends - can they even tell we are Christian?

What's more surprising – that these tenants in the parable are so selfish or that we are so much like these tenants? What's more surprising – that we are so very much like these tenants or that the Lord of the Harvest is so patient with us...that he simply refuses to give up on us?

Put this parable into context. He spoke these words on a Tuesday. What was so special about this particular Tuesday? It was Holy Week, and in three days Jesus would willingly walk to Golgotha. But on this Tuesday, speaking to many of the very same people who would later in the week shout out, "**Crucify him!**" Jesus explains how the mighty, loving God deals with the stubbornness and sinfulness of mankind. "**He sent his son to them.**" They killed the prophets and abused his spokespeople – but that didn't stop God from sending a Savior...his very Son.

Could we hear better, more beautiful words than these? "**He sent his son to them.**" Now in the parable, even the son was rejected. The sad truth is, his Son has been rejected millions of times by millions of people. But that Son has also been sent to you and me. That Son, who was so perfect in every way, has come to and claimed repeat offenders like you and me. That Son, who was beaten and bruised and bloodied for the sin of the world, bled also to cover our sins.

The Father has planted you. He did so, for many of you, at your baptisms. With great care, he has planted you. And so badly he wants to see fruits...that means he wants you to be about his work. And Jesus says... "**The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.**" Think about that. What makes God most happy and content is when you, with a child-like faith, listen to and believe in Jesus. Jesus didn't call Peter blessed because he was the disciple who was able to walk a few steps on water; no, he called him blessed when Peter had exclaimed: **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.** Jesus didn't praise the Centurion because he was a man of power and influence; no, he held that Centurion up as an example of one who trusted in Jesus.

And so, what the Lord desires most is that you would continue to believe...trust in Jesus above all else. And that is the fruit he is looking for...expecting...wanting. That is the fruit he will help you to produce.

Don't think for a moment that the Lord ever gets tired of you. How filled with joy he is when you confess your sins and then find comfort and joy in his absolution. He pleased he is when we sing hymns...when we prepare sermons and preach sermons and listen to sermons...when we gather around his table and receive the very supper Jesus has prepared for us. How happy the Lord is when we pray *(as we have done and will do today)*

- Lord, have mercy on us
- Create in me a clean heart
- Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your peace
- Almighty Father, bless this Word;
Which through your grace we now have heard.
Oh, may the precious seed take root,
Spring up, and bear abundant fruit.
(that's going to be our closing hymn today)

And how glad he is when his believers depart at peace from this place...and live in peace with others...until we finally depart at peace for eternity. Amen.