

WHOSE VINEYARD IS IT?

Jesus had a way of teaching in parables in which suddenly someone finds themselves in it. Suddenly one realizes that the characters in the parable includes the ones he is talking to.

So as we read this parable today, we can see ourselves and we can see God and Jesus in the story.

In teaching this way, Jesus was able to get the attention of everyone including us.

But as we were taught in seminary, we are always looking for the good news. We are to ask where is God in the story and where is the Gospel or the good news?

To me, the good news here seems to come through the question of Who's Vineyard Is This anyway, meaning whose world, whose creation is it we are living in?

Martin Luther once said that sometimes you have to squeeze a biblical passage until it leaks the Gospel.

As we search this lesson, there is good news in it.

First of all, the tenants in this story seem to think that the vineyard belongs to them. That they own it.

Jump forward to today. Don't we sometimes think this world we live in is ours?

Remember the words of this song:

He's got the whole world, in his hands,

He's got you and me brother, in his hands,

He's got you and me sister, in hands

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He's got everybody here. In his hands.

He's got the whole world in his hands.

The point is that the vineyard or the world as we know it never belongs to us. We are the tenants called and blessed to take care of it.

In this story, the owner, representing God the creator, plants the vineyard and then leases it to tenants and goes to another country.

Doesn't that sound familiar?

The creator created the world and then put tenants, including you and me, in charge of it. So the Tenants, like us, never owned the vineyard.

Then the owner or God, sent slaves to take care of the harvest when it was time.

But the tenants didn't like it. They seized the slaves, beat and killed them.

The story begins to hit home with us. We slip into thinking we own and control everything.

The owner has to do something new. The owner, who represents God, sends his son thinking they will respect him.

But when the son comes, the tenants say this is the heir. Let's kill him and get the inheritance.

So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Again, that sounds familiar.

God sent his Son, they called him Jesus.

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So when the owner comes, what will he do to those tenants?

They said he will put them to death and lease the vineyard to other tenants. Of course, Jesus is using this story to illustrate what really happens in the world.

Jesus said, "have you never read the scriptures?"

The stone that the builders rejected will be the cornerstone for their lives.

Finally the chief priests and the Pharisees realize that he is talking about them.

They are called to be the tenants of God's creation but when they fail and think they are in charge, God has to do something else. So God sends Jesus to be the stone of their foundation on which their faith and lives are built on.

And, as we know, this owner is rejected.

The Gospel here is that this rejected one, Jesus will still be the cornerstone of our faith.

He will be the cornerstone of their lives and our lives.

This is God's vineyard that we are called to work in. We are now the tenants of this vineyard we are in.

Like the tenants in this story we have failed at it and so this Son sent by God is sent to forgive us and give us a new start.

Like the chief priests and Pharisees, God opens our hearts and minds to see that God is also talking about us.

When we have failed, God sets us on our feet again to start all over.

God owns this vineyard we live in and we are tenants to help the vineyard grow.

We might think of the vineyard as the church. The mission of this owner of the vineyard is to save the owner's people from their sins.

We are given a job to do to care for the vineyard God has put us in.

Part of the good news we get from this parable is that God never ever gives up on us. God keeps coming after us and does what has to be done to put us on our feet again.

This vineyard story is an illustration of what God has done and continues to do in our world and in our lives.

I am reminded of another song with the words, You are the vine, we are the branches.

What a great illustration of our place in this world.

GOD IS THE VINE, WE ARE THE BRANCHES. God continues to be the vine or the cornerstone of our lives and faith.

THANKS BE TO GOD!