

Season of LENT

Prayer

As Christ is our cornerstone, O heavenly Father, and the rock upon which all our hopes rest, so bring to completion all that You have begun in us, and grant to us all things needful and profitable for our salvation, that we might be the people in whom You delight and through whom You show forth Your mercy. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 126

(antiphon v. 3)

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:(4b-7) 8-14

Luke 20:9-20

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 430

Other Hymns – 575 (OT), 425/426

(E), 429 (E), 644 (G), 909 (G), 912 (G),

427, 433

Help us to press on, O Lord, against all enemies and strive for the goal of the upward call in Christ, our Savior. We rejoice that we are not alone but surrounded by a great host of saints and fellow citizens of heaven, here and throughout the world. Bless our unity in doctrine and faith, and help us work as partners in Christ for the advancement of His kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Bless Your Church, O Lord, and bless those who serve us in Your name. Raise up godly men and women as servants of Your kingdom, and lead us to honor the preaching of Your Word of the cross of Christ and the discipline of Your house for our benefit and blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Guard us, O Lord, against all those who cause strife, whose acts of violence and terror threaten people everywhere, and who seek to destroy order and peace. Bless the service men and women who defend us at home and abroad and all police, firefighters and emergency personnel who work on our behalf. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Make our homes places of blessing and love, O Lord, that husbands and wives may honor the promises of their marriage and faithfully care for the children You have given them. And help us to honour Your gift of life from its natural beginning to its natural end. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Where people suffer in body or spirit, bring healing and peace, O Lord. Sustain the weary with Your Word, and grant the ill healing according to Your will. We lift before You the names of those requesting our prayers [including _____] and those named in our hearts . . . Be with them in their hour of need and comfort them, that they may not be overcome by struggle, grief or pain. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Teach us to love You above all things, O Lord, lest we gain possessions and lose our salvation. Lead us to use wisely and for Your will and purpose all the things of this life, and accept with our gratitude the tithes and offerings we bring, tokens of our faith and symbols of our trust in You to give us all that we need. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Prepare our hearts, O Lord, to receive for our benefit the blessed food of Christ's body and blood in this Holy Sacrament. Unite us in faith, that this Holy Communion may show forth our common faith and equip us to live together in love as You have loved us and forgiven all our sins. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

All these things we pray, O heavenly Father, in the name of our suffering Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



LENTEN SERMON

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT
April 3, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 20:9-20

‘The Rock Of Salvation Or The Crushing Stone Of Judgment?’

“The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush him.”

Today’s Gospel Reading could be called “the parable of the wicked tenants” or “the reckless landlord” . . . depending on how you look at it. It’s a parable of judgment – a judgment that is based entirely on the person and work of Jesus. The question that Jesus is forcing home to all those who had ears to hear was this: Will religious Israel receive Him in faith as the Messiah and Saviour, or will they reject Him in unbelief? As much as it was the question that Jesus put to the religious leaders back then, it is still the question that is set before the world and even the Church today and everyday.

Jesus spoke this parable early in that last week as He steadily made His way to His death on Friday. Things were spinning rapidly toward the cross. The previous Sunday, Jesus had been welcomed into Jerusalem, hailed as a king, the people shouting: “Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” He cleared the temple of money changers and overturned their tables. He wept over the unbelief of Jerusalem and prophesied its destruction. He irritated the religious leaders when they questioned His authority.

And then He tells them this parable of a landholder and his tenant farmers. “A man planted a vineyard, and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.” The people of Jesus’ day would have been familiar with that arrangement. Many of the people were tenant farmers, working the land of another who lived far away. The parable begins with a note of grace. The landlord planted the vineyard. He did all the preparation, all the work to guarantee a

harvest. The tenants simply had to tend the plants, harvest the fruit, and pay the owner his agreed upon share.

But tenants and landlords are rarely on the same side of the bargaining table. The relationship between owners and tenants is usually tense at best. Most of us would rather be owners than renters. It makes sense. Renters pay out rent, while owners collect the rent. Owners control the property while tenants are under another's control. Control is the name of the game. We do not like to be at another's mercy, even when the other is God Himself.

When you stop and think about it, we are tenants, not owners. Everything we have is on loan from God. We sometimes imagine that we are owners. 'It's my money and I can spend it as I please.' 'It's my body and I can do what I want with it.' 'It's my time and I can use it however I wish.' 'It's my life and I don't need God or the Church or anyone to tell me how to run it.' 'It's our church and we can do as we please in it.' That's the myth of this age. But the truth is that God is the owner, and we are His tenants. We never really own anything, we are only stewards. And as stewards, we have a responsibility to use His gifts wisely and faithfully. God gives His gifts in the hope of finding a harvest of fruit . . . that would be trust in Him and love for one another, and which comes when we fear, love, and trust God above all things.

The tenants, however, rebelled against their landlord. When harvest time came, the land owner sent one of his servants. Instead of giving him the produce that was owed, they beat him and sent him away empty handed. Again, the owner sent another servant, and they beat him up too . . . insulted him and sent him back empty handed. And again, he sent a third servant, whom the tenants wounded and sent back with nothing.

The landlord then says, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Maybe they will respect him." There was nothing in the track record of those tenants to suggest they would. And you have to stop and wonder. What kind of father would send his beloved son to a bunch of people who have already mistreated his servants? The parable gives us a picture of God's patience, of His relentless mercy, of His incredible love, and of His passionate will and desire to save us at all costs. What sort of father would send his beloved son to a lot of murderous, deadbeat tenants?

The answer? "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life." And again:

“God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” And further: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Yes, while we were still His enemies, cut off from God, turned against Him in rebellion, the Father sent His Son into the world, to take on our humanity, to become one with us, to save the very world that rejected Him. And God sent His beloved Son even after the world . . . and Israel herself . . . had beaten, stoned, and killed God’s servants – the prophets who came to prepare the Son’s way. But that is the nature of God’s mercy. He keeps coming back again and again, seeking the fruit of repentance and faith, risking everything.

When the tenants saw the son, they assumed that the owner was dead. They came up with a plot. “Kill the son, and the inheritance is ours.” It sounds crazy, but it’s actually quite possible. After all, if the owner of the land died and left no heirs, the tenants could claim title to the land free and clear. Provided, of course, that they could get away with the murder of the son . . . which is why they killed him outside of the vineyard.

All this, of course, is a picture of Jesus’ impending death. Within a few days of speaking this parable, the religious authorities of Jerusalem would stir up Jesus’ crucifixion at the hands of Pilate, and which would take place on a rocky hill called Golgotha – the Place of the Skull. . . and outside the city. The parable would become reality. God sent His Son to His vineyard, His Israel; and His Son was despised and rejected and killed outside the city gates of Jerusalem.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to those ungrateful tenants? He will come and destroy those tenants, and give the vineyard to others.” And which is precisely what happened. Less than forty years after Jesus’ crucifixion outside Jerusalem, the Roman army came and destroyed the city and its temple. The glory of God that once resided in the temple was now in the Church – not a building but a people gathered around the Word of Christ and the Sacrament of His body and blood. The priesthood of the temple ended, and the ministry of the Word and the Sacrament began.

The son is the end of the line of those the owner of the vineyard sent in the parable. He is the last word from the vineyard owner. Reject the son and there is nothing but judgment. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: “In the past, God spoke to His people by the prophets. But now in these last days, God has spoken to us by His beloved Son.” Jesus is God’s last word to Israel . . . and to the world. There is no other way to the Father than through Him. Salvation in no other name but Jesus. No other Saviour from sin and death but Jesus, the beloved Son of God, who came to His own, who was rejected and crucified, whose death the Father received as the atoning sacrifice for our sin.

And to reject the Son is to reject the Father’s will to save you. The tenants in the parable were condemned not because they were worse tenants than any other in the neighbourhood, not because their harvest was poor. Rather, they were condemned because they rejected the owner’s servants . . . and last of all, his son. It is in the rejection of the Son, and only in His rejection, that judgment comes.

Now, while the parable was a warning to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day not to reject His coming and His claim; it also serves as a warning to the Church of every age not to take God’s grace for granted, not to reject the Son who comes to us in the name of the Lord, not to despise His Baptism or the Supper of His body and blood or His Word of forgiveness. God forces His grace on no one. He forces no one to be saved from death and hell. He gives His gifts, sends His Son, gives the Holy Spirit who delivers all that Jesus won for us by His death. And He now awaits the harvest – broken and contrite hearts, faith in His Son Jesus Christ, love for one another.

And don’t be deceived by appearances. The Son may appear weak. God’s servants may appear as the wimps and losers of this world. The Church may look like a failing institution against the backdrop of this world’s great success stories. After all, as Jesus says, quoting from Psalm 118, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.” Israel was expecting something much different from the Messiah than Jesus was willing to deliver. They wanted glory; but Jesus came to bring forgiveness. They wanted the glory days of David and Solomon; but Jesus came to die on a cross and rise from the dead. They wanted vengeance over their enemies; but Jesus came to bring them real and lasting peace. They wanted strength; but Jesus brought a strength made perfect in weakness. They wanted wealth and prosperity; but Jesus came to give them forgiveness. They wanted a good life here and now; but Jesus came to bring them eternal life in the hereafter. He is the rejected stone, the stone the builders of Israel stumbled over in blind unbelief, the rejected cornerstone of salvation.

In the end, the full weight of our life rests on Jesus. “Everyone who falls on that stone named Jesus Christ will be broken to pieces.” We must be broken, if we are going to be made whole again; as the psalmist declares: “A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, you will not despise.” We must die – die daily to ourselves in repentance – if we are going to truly live. The alternative to falling on Christ in repentance is to be crushed by the sheer weight of His presence. “But when that rejected stone falls on any one, it will crush him,” Jesus adds. Either receive the forgiveness, life, and salvation that Jesus won for you by His death on the cross, and trust in Him; or be crushed resisting and refusing His death and resurrection. Every sin has been spoken for in the death of Jesus. Every sin is forgivable. Every sinner has been died for. There is absolutely no sin that is unforgivable except for the sin of unbelief, for the sin of turning away from the Saviour and the way of forgiveness and salvation that He so freely offers.

There is an ironic twist in this parable. The wicked tenants thought that by killing the son they could gain the inheritance. And in a twisted way, they were right. Through the death of the Son comes the life of the world and the inheritance of eternal life. God used the rejection of Israel to work the forgiveness and salvation of all. Who would have imagined that God’s idea of saving the world would involve His Son being killed at the hands of the religious leaders of His own people . . . and that God would make that miserable, unjust death of His Son the atoning sacrifice for sin?!

But what will the Father do with His Son who has been cast out of the vineyard and killed by the wicked tenants? That’s the question that wasn’t asked in the parable. What will the father do with His dead son? Why, He will raise His beloved Son from the dead, and seat Him at the right hand of power, forgive those who killed him, and give the inheritance of eternal life to all who trust in Him.

Trust in the Son – that rejected Stone who is now the cornerstone of your salvation. Fall on Him with all the brokenness of your life, for He was broken for you. And He will raise you up and give you life, “just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.” Amen.