Season after
PENTECOST

Collect of the Day

Gracious God, You gave Your Son into the hands of sinful men who killed Him. Forgive us when we reject Your unfailing love, and grant us the fullness of Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 80:7-19 (antiphon v. 7)
Isaiah 5:1-7
Philippians 3:4b-14
Matthew 21:33-46

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 544
Other Hymns – 540 (OT, G), 827 (OT, G), 664 (E), 912 (G)

Prayers

With grateful and thankful hearts let us pray to the Lord from whom all blessings flow.

Lord, we are Your vineyard, planted by Your grace for Your glory. Give us willing hearts, that we may honour You with the good fruit You desire and glorify Your name in all that we think, say and do. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord, when we had nothing to honour You with but only the sin that shamed us and gave us death, You showed us Your great mercy, cleansing us from our sins by our Savior's blood, covering us with His righteousness, and imparting to us, by the Spirit, the obedience of faith. Bless all pastors and church workers, and help us to pursue with all our energies the cause of the Gospel, both at home and abroad. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we are weak and fearful. Deliver us from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. Bless our prime minister, premier, and all elected and appointed officials. Guide them with Your wisdom to work for the common good. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we judge too easily with our eyes and trust too little in Your Word. Give us courage that we may remain faithful before temptation, in the face of trouble and when facing the trials of this mortal life. Encourage us, that we may without fear count all things as loss for the sake of Christ. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

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Lord, You know only too well the afflictions of body and soul and the shadow of death that hangs over us and all we do. According to Your will, give healing to the sick, relief to those in pain, recovery to those who have had surgery, peace to those troubled in mind and hope in the hour of death. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we so easily regard that which You have given us as our own to do with as we please. Give us grateful hearts and contentment with Your daily and rich supply of all things for this body and life. Move our hearts to generosity, that with thanksgiving we may return to You the tithes and offerings You are due and supply our neighbour in need with the resources You have entrusted to our care. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we come as a people tossed to and fro by the manifold changes of this mortal life. Help us to know in You that which is eternal. Give us such confidence in the suffering and death of Christ that we may not fear the sun by day or the darkness by night, but rejoice that You are with us always as we await the joyous appearing of Your Son with all His saints; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Season after PENTECOST SERMON

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)

Sermon Text: Matthew 21:33-46

"The Fruit Goes to God"

Every year around this time we celebrate Thanksgiving and give thanks for the fruits of the earth which our heavenly Father has so graciously provided. In today's Gospel Reading, Jesus fittingly tells a parable set in the time when the fruits were ripened and being brought in. So he says: "*There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to get his fruit."*

Now, this is a bit of a reversal to our idea of celebrating the harvest at Thanksgiving; for if the master is God in this parable, as He is in most of Jesus' parables, it appears that He is intent on getting the fruit, rather than giving it. Moreover, in this parable the master is not looking for thanks from those who have received his fruit. Rather, He is looking to have the fruit for himself. He, after all, had planted the vineyard and fenced it in and provided a winepress so that he might have fruit and wine. He built a tower so that the fruit would be defended and no one else would get it but him. And when the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to get his fruit. What a greedy master he appears to be! Is Jesus presenting our heavenly Father as someone who wants all the fruit for Himself?

The parable continues: *"And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them saying, 'They will respect my son'."*

Now, while at Thanksgiving we thank God for the fruits that we have received from His gracious hand; in this parable, however, the servants are sent to go and get the fruit for their master. And when the first are beaten and killed, the master sends more. The servants seem to be expendable in order that the master gets his produce. He is even willing to send his own son into danger with the hope that he will be

able to get the fruit. In hearing the parable, we know immediately that this is a bad idea. It's insane that the master would send his son into danger after the servants were killed. But that is exactly what the master does.

If God is the master and His servants are the prophets whom He has sent and who have been beaten and killed by the Jewish leaders, why would He expect anything different to happen when He sends His Son? And so it happens: *"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."*

Now, remember that Jesus is teaching this parable during Holy Week. The chief priests and elders of the people have already planned to do away with Him. And in a few days their plan came to fruition. Jesus, the Son of God, is arrested, falsely accused, condemned, and taken outside the city to be crucified – just as Jesus said would happen in this parable.

But why does this greedy master allow this to happen? Are his eyes so focused on the fruit that he loses sight of the danger into which he sends his own son? Does he want to have that fruit so badly that he foolishly loses his own dear child. Surely Jesus would not portray the heavenly Father as being so foolish.

The parable then closes with a question about the main point of it all. "*When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes what will he do with those tenants?*" The answer: "*He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.*"

The tenants will be put to a miserable death as they deserve, but the main point of doing so is that the owner will have the fruits. The vineyard will be let out to others who will give him the fruits. The main thrust of the whole parable is that the owner gets the fruits.

Now, this harvest parable is not about thanking God for giving us the fruits of the earth. Rather, it's about God getting all the fruits for Himself. Everything is directed toward that end – the planting, the fencing, the tower, the letting out of the vineyard to farmers, the sending of servants for the harvest, the sending of the son to his death, the execution of the tenants who would not yield the fruit, and the appointing of new tenants who will. It's all about the fruit going to God alone.

But that is not exactly in line with our celebration of Thanksgiving, is it? . . . of giving thanks to God for the fruits of the earth that He has given to us. Thanksgiving, after all, is about praising God for His great generosity, not His great greed. Is He no different from the false pagan gods who demand ever more and more offerings? They needed to be fed and placated and pleased lest the people endure their wrath . . . much like the wrath the landowner in this parable visited upon the tenants who would not yield to him the

fruit of the vineyard. Is that what Jesus is saying here? That we should give our firstfruits offerings to God out of guilt and fear? Hardly.

Now, this parable about the fruits of the vineyard going to the master is based on the song of the prophet Isaiah written 700 years before – today's Old Testament Reading. At the end of the song proclaiming the laborious loving care of the beloved in establishing the vineyard, we are told of the tragedy that the grapes were sour, and the vineyard is to be destroyed. Then it is revealed that "*the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting.*"

In other words, the vineyard and its fruits are the people of God. In the passage from Isaiah they are, however, unfaithful people who do not acknowledge all that the Lord has done for them and are sour in rejecting His love and care. In Jesus' parable it is not the vineyard that is destroyed but the tenants of the vineyard who will not give the fruits to the owner; that is, the unfaithful chief priests and elders who will not lead the people to their loving God who established them and protected them and nourished them and wants them for His very own treasured possession.

The owner has gone to great lengths to establish this people for Himself. He treasures them. He has protected them from danger to both body and soul. He has fenced them in to protect this faithful people from foreign annihilation. He has preserved the faith throughout generations and kingdoms. These fruits, these faithful people, are most precious to Him. And He is willing to sacrifice everything to have them. He has given spiritual leaders over the people to teach them to love and trust in the owner of the vineyard so that they will look to Him for protection in every danger and salvation from every pitfall.

The chief priests and elders, however, had decided to keep the people for themselves so that they might receive honour and reverence. This is why they determined to put Jesus to death – to kill the owner's son. At the beginning of the week, when Jesus had entered Jerusalem and the people were shouting, "*Hosanna*," "*the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him'.*" And a few days later we then read: "*the chief priests and elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.*"

By telling this parable, Jesus shows that He knows that all of this will happen to Him, and so also does the owner of the vineyard, the heavenly Father. But why? Why is the Father willing to send His Son in order to save His people, if He knows that the Son will be killed? It makes no sense unless the Father knows more – knows that His Son will not remain dead . . . knows something marvelous that Jesus reveals at the end of this parable by quoting from Psalm 118: "*The stone the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes*" . . . knows that the sacrificial death of His Son outside

the city walls is the cornerstone of the faith of God's people, the price of their redemption from sin and death so that they may be His own treasured possession.

Yes, God our Father in heaven is greedy for you. He loves you. You are His treasure, His fruit. He has given everything in order to have you as His dear child – even His own Son. He will not let anyone keep you from Him. For you, after all, belong to Him, paid for by the suffering and death of His own Son. And He desires nothing other than that you remain His precious fruit.

And so, as you give thanks this weekend for the fruits of the earth that our heavenly Father gives to you to sustain your physical life; give thanks also and above all to Him who, through the death of His own Son, has made you His precious, chosen fruit. Amen.