



Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity - 4th October

Father God, help us to come to you this morning with open and thankful hearts. Fill us with the joy and peace that comes with knowing you. Be with us as we walk in your light, rejoice in your love and reflect your glory. **Amen**

Hymn 54: At the name of Jesus

Welcome

The Lord be with you,
and also with you

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself". There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen

Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in life eternal through Jesus Christ our lord. **Amen**

Gloria

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 5:1–7

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watch-tower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

Hymn 66: Be still and know

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew
Glory to you, O Lord

'Listen 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. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They 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.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders reject has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"? Therefore, 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. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

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

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

Sermon: Revd Petra Shakeshaft

It's very helpful to hear the Isaiah passage alongside the Gospel reading this morning.

It's a passage with which Jesus' audience of Chief priests and Pharisees would be very familiar, after all, they are the custodians, if you like, or the teachers of Scripture.

To answer their question to him about his authority

Jesus tells them a parable.

On the surface, this is a straightforward allegory.

The vineyard is Israel.

The tenant farmers are the leaders of Israel; the Chief priests and the Pharisees.

The owner, of course, is God.

Those early messengers are the prophets – God's messengers,
and the Son is Jesus.

In Isaiah's vineyard, despite the care of the vineyard owner,
it yields only wild grapes, not the ripe, full-grown fruit he had hoped for.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,

*and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice, but saw bloodshed;
righteousness, but heard a cry.*

The people are rebellious and the vineyard will be destroyed.
*I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;*

At the beginning of the chapter in which our gospel reading is set,
Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem with cheering crowds.
He goes to the Temple, drives out the traders and overturns the tables of the moneychangers,
screaming Scripture at them,
*My house shall be a house of prayer,
but you have made it a den of thieves!*

Not an act to win him friends among the leaders of the Temple,
after all, the economy of the Temple relies on the trade in its courts from visiting pilgrims.

The Chief priests and Pharisees also understand the economy of the vineyard –
The owner lets the vineyard to tenants for a share of the profits.
The vineyard belongs to the owner though, as does the harvest,
so any attempt to inherit the vineyard is illegal – it's theft.
This is a provocative parable, aimed at the leaders of the Temple.

The Chief Priests and the Pharisees are charged with nurturing the people, bringing the harvest,
the ripened fruits, the faithful hearts of the people, to God,
caring for the vulnerable, feeding the poor ... being spiritual leaders,
but instead they run an exclusive outfit that guards their positions
and lines their pockets with the takings from the traders in the temple courts.

Jesus ends the parable with another quote from scripture.
*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;*

*The one who falls on this stone, he says, will be broken to pieces;
and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.*

This is the stumbling block. Jesus is the stumbling block.
The Pharisees and Chief priests have overlooked the cornerstone,
believing everything rests on them.
They have an overdeveloped sense of their *own* importance and entitlement.
Instead of being the channels of God's grace that they should be,
they have become guards on closed doors between God and his people.
God is safe in the sanctuary of the Temple and, unless you meet our criteria, you may not come in.

It's something we need to be constantly aware of, constantly on the lookout for in ourselves as individuals and as a church.

Church history is littered with casualties:

the exclusion of divorcees and unmarried mothers,

our appalling record with the LGBTQ communities.

I have spoken to people who say they don't feel good enough for church,

even people who come to church – don't feel good enough

because of some thing that went wrong in their lives long ago.

People carry that pain and rejection with them for years.

In Jesus, God steps out of the Temple and gathers up the broken, the weak and the poor. he heals the sick and reaches out and frees those imprisoned by unforgiveness.

The cornerstone is the stone on which everything rests, and yet, this stone, allows himself to be despised and rejected and killed;

The parable of the tenants in the vineyard is a warning to those who behave as though they own God's kingdom are in trouble.

There is a fatal arrogance in the belief that the kingdom of God belongs to us, that our presence in the vineyard rests on anything other than God's grace.

It is a precious gift to be swept up into his love, not a property to be claimed or held apart from others.

In grasping for the kingdom, focussed on holding it for themselves, the Pharisees and Chief priests don't see the cornerstone and so will trip and fall. They will drop the thing they never really held – it was all an illusion.

Of course they might have wondered, as may we - in Jesus' story about the tenants in the vineyard, why, when the tenants had already beaten, killed and stoned the messenger slaves, did the owner send his only beloved son?

Why not Isaiah's trampled vineyard and wasted vines?

The thing about God is, nothing and no one is beyond his hope.

The vineyard owner sends messenger after messenger to give the tenants a chance to do the right thing

and, when they don't, sends his son that they might listen to him.

The Prophets and messengers across the centuries were sent by God to his people calling them to turn from selfishness, wickedness, greed and all the idols of this world and still they didn't listen.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

We need to put ourselves in the place of the Pharisees and Chief priests,

I don't think we can get away with saying this parable is just for church leaders. We are all called to be channels of God's grace; to love and nurture people into faith, to tend those fragile fruits; those fragile hearts, for God for they belong to God. The kingdom is *God's* vineyard.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers

The Peace

Take a moment and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for each other and our church family church community. Maybe call or text someone who would enjoy sharing the peace with you.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy, that you may be kept safe and blameless in spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Hymn 572: Praise to the Holiest in the height

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours.
Now and for ever. Amen.**

Hymn 227: God of Mercy, God of Grace

Remembering the Lord's Supper

Take a moment to remember the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. As we think about this meal - with the washing of feet and bread and wine shared with friends - we remember Jesus' offering of himself on the cross. We rejoice in his resurrection from the dead and look forward to the coming of God's Kingdom. While we cannot receive Christ in the sacraments in the usual way, we can be the presence of Christ in our homes and communities and we can be a praying presence wherever we are.

Hymn 716: We have a Gospel to Proclaim

Closing Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for this time of worship; may your love and peace remain with us in the coming days. Be with us in all that we will think, say and do so that our lives may reflect your glory. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen

If you have any prayer or pastoral needs, please don't hesitate to contact
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