

St. Marks Episcopal Church – October 8, 2023

Pentecost 19 A – Track 2

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Gospel: Matthew 21:33-46

Faith and Evangelism

Unlike most of my initial attempts, my last two homilies came to me fairly easily. The first ones came with a lot of research and reading. For the last two, the words just seemed to flow and almost write themselves. Then, Michelle said she would like to be able to spend some time with Glen and go with him on a little trip. She asked me if I would be able to take over the service today. I said no problem. Such hubris. You know what God does to those that are over confident? Sort of like the saying, “God laughs as man makes plans.” Well, He must have had a good chuckle as I sat down and thought I would be able to knock this homily out in no time at all. Needless to say, that was not the case.

Most homilies and sermons are based on the Gospel reading for the day. However, it is OK to base it on one of the other readings. Since I was struggling to find a good topic from the Gospel, I looked at the Old Testament reading and the Psalm and even the New Testament reading for inspiration. No help for me in any of them. It seems like Jesus based part of his parable on the Old Testament reading of Isaiah – they start in a similar manner. The Psalm for today also speaks of vineyards and God preparing the land. No help there. The New Testament reading is from Paul’s letter to the Philippians, and also did not provide me with any inspiration. So, back to the Gospel reading and more research.

In this Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the “the evil tenant farmers.” This takes place on the morning after Palm Sunday, after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. My synopsis of this parable is as follows. A land owner has done all of the work to prepare the land to produce wine. He planted the vineyard, dug the wine press in it, put a fence around it and built a watch tower. He then hired tenants to tend to the vines. When it came time to harvest the grapes, he sent slaves to collect the produce. The tenants beat and killed the slaves. So, the land owner sent his son to collect the produce. The tenants killed him also.

In this parable God is the land owner, the slaves were prophets sent to prepare the way, the son is Jesus and the evil tenants are the Pharisees. Jesus is talking about himself and his situation and stating what is to going to happen to Him. He is not teaching on a mountainside or on the shore of the sea. He is taking time out to teach while He is on His way to the cross. He is telling His story. He is saying what is about to happen to Him. He knows he has come from God and that He is about to return to Him. It is here that Jesus, pretty clearly, predicts his death at the hands of the Pharisees.

We can also consider this in terms of the history of the Israelites. God sent prophets, leaders and monarchs to his people. He sent Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, King David, Solomon and others to them and the people did not listen. They still rebelled and sinned and broke the laws. Repeatedly. He tried again and again to save not just the Israelites, but all People. So, He sent his Son.

God did not give up on the Israelites then, and he does not give up on us now. God loves us. He loves us so much that he gave his son to suffer death on the cross for our salvation. And, he doesn't ask much of us in return. He asks us to love one another as we love ourselves and also to "spread the word". He calls us to proclaim the Good News; to tell the story of Jesus; and introduce others to Him. He wants us to be "the people that produce the fruits of the kingdom" so that we can be the ones that receive the kingdom of God.

With faith and continued participation in His mission for us, we can make the world, or at least our little piece of it, a better place for all of His children. There is that word again. Faith.

A couple of weeks ago I read and provided a "Prayer for Faith. Several of you requested copies, so I would like to again end with that prayer.

Dear God, some days are truly harder than others. I continue to pray to You day by day, but sometimes, it feels like these efforts no longer suffice. Sometimes I feel so alone, and in this solitude, my strength and faith waver. Please grant me strength, oh Lord, to ride turbulent waters that test my faith. Help me to remain steadfast even in times of loneliness. I pray that You will make Your presence known because I know even on days when I may not feel You, I know You are always everywhere around me. You are my one true God, and it is only in Your loving embrace that I find safety in dark times. Amen