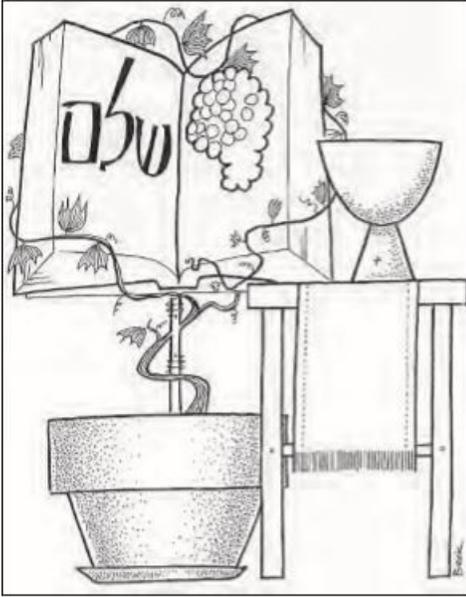


Oct 8, 2023 Mt. 21: 33-46 & Ex 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

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Mt. 21: 33-46

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Once again Jesus confronts the powers that be with their evil mistreatment of his Father's people. They even set it up so that the law permitted the takeover of property of someone who died without heirs. One wonders if Jesus was thinking that by killing him, they could do that with the people who were following him as well. Why else risk everything as they did by killing him? He then becomes the stone that the builders had rejected, only to become the cornerstone. By the time Matthew has written this gospel, the temple, with its Sadducee leadership is gone. The newborn community of the "Way" is slowly attracting more and more with its witness to the kind of God that Jesus revealed. Each age tends its own vineyard. How are we doing in our vineyards?

33 Listen to another parable: There was a **landowner** who planted a **vineyard**. He put a **wall** around it, dug a winepress in it and built a **watchtower**. Then he rented the **vineyard** to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the **harvest time** approached, he sent his **servants** to the **tenants** to collect his **fruit**. 35 The **tenants seized** his **servants**; they **beat** one, **killed** another, and **stoned** a third. 36 Then he sent other **servants** to them, more than the first time, and the **tenants** treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his **son** to them. 'They will **respect** my **son**,' he said. 38 But when the **tenants** saw the **son**, they said to each other, 'This is the **heir**. Come, let's **kill** him and take his **inheritance**.' 39 So they took him and **threw** him out of the **vineyard** and **killed** him. 40 Therefore, when the owner of the **vineyard** comes, what will he do to those **tenants**?' 41 He will bring those **wretches** to a **wretched** end," they replied, "and he will rent the **vineyard** to other **tenants**, who will give him his share of the crop at **harvest time**." 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The **stone** the **builders** rejected has become the **capstone**; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" 43 Therefore I tell you that the **kingdom of God** will be taken away from you and given to a people who will **produce** its fruit. 44 He who **falls** on this **stone** will be **broken** to pieces, but he on whom it **falls** will be **crushed**." 45 When the **chief priests** and the **Pharisees** heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were **afraid** of the crowd because the people held that he was a **prophet**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Each of us is asked to take our place in the watchtowers of our day. How do we deal with the abuse of power we see from our individual towers?

PRAYER: Jesus, you are very aware of the ways we set things up so to protect our advantages. You also know how we create stumbling blocks out of what should be capstones. On your cross you asked your and our Father to forgive us because we don't know what we are doing. Help us to learn from you so that we don't stumble around in self-imposed ignorance any longer. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

LAND OWNER: The Jewish people believed that everything and everyone belongs to God. They were simply the tenants or servants of the land God had given them.



If you were listening to this parable, how would you feel about the 'end of the story' if you were a Gentile? A religious leader? A poor peasant?

VINEYARD: A vineyard was a great work. It took a lot to create it and keep it fruitful. The nation of Israel was often spoken of as the vineyard of God.
Could the desperate condition of Israel under Herod, give insight to the way that people would have heard this parable? How? Why?

WALL: A wall can be something to protect or imprison. Walls were built around vineyards to protect the investment of the owner's hard work.
How is the wall serving in this parable? What walls have you built to protect your beliefs? Do they protect or imprison you as you try to grow in your faith life?

WATCHTOWER: A watchtower enables someone to have advantage over a possible threat.

What beliefs do you have that help you deal with the threats to your faith? How much labor went into building your tower? Into the constant care of your tower?

HARVEST TIME: The harvest time in scripture was often used as a metaphor for the end of the age. It is the time when all the hard work and tender care pays off.

Do you think that people felt that God's harvest time was coming soon? Why? Do you think that people today feel that God's harvest time is coming soon? Why?

SERVANTS: A servant is someone who is told to do something and not to question the master's orders.

Do you think that the religious authorities see themselves as servants? How can their self-understanding affect the way they hear this parable?

TENANTS: A tenant is someone who is living on land owned by another, and has responsibilities to the owner.

Do you think any of the religious authorities see themselves as tenants? If not, why not? Do you think the 'little ones' see themselves as tenants? If so, why?

FRUIT: A healthy plant naturally bears fruit.

What does this imply about the vineyard, and those who have worked the vineyard?

BEAT: To beat is to have power to inflict pain on someone or something.

How do you feel about the fact that the tenants were able to inflict pain on the servants of the owner? Does this touch the question of "Why bad things happen to good people"?

KILLED: In Jesus' time, if the owner of property died without heirs, the property reverted to those working the land.

How does knowing this, affect the way you hear this parable? Many thought God had abandoned the people, or at least was uninterested in their fate. Try to imagine the different possibilities inherent in this situation, once the son was killed.

STONED: Stoning was the penalty for blasphemy. Many thought Jesus was guilty of blasphemy in the way he talked about himself and God.

Could a case be made for such a charge within this parable? Might the 'radical right' of Jesus' day feel justified in their righteous anger?

SON: A son is the future of the father, as well as the whole family, in the Jewish frame of reference.

How might killing the son in this parable impact those in religious authority? On the 'little ones'?

RESPECT: The religious authorities had no respect for Jesus' teaching about God.

Why do you think this was so?

HEIR: When Jesus talked about his relationship with God, he used 'son' or 'son of man'.

What implication does this have for the story? For your story?

INHERITANCE: An inheritance is something given because of someone else's work. The law of the day made it possible for someone to inherit something by unjust means.

How did the teachings about God, current in Jesus' day make it impossible for the 'little ones' to inherit the kingdom?

WRETCH -WRETCHED: Someone/ something is a wretch/wretched if they/it are; miserable, in exile, or driven out forcibly. Many of the 'little ones' are driven out by the religious teachings of the day.

How does this parable turn the tables on the people in the story? Who ends up wretched?

STONE: Stones are the foundation of all sturdy-building projects. Choosing carefully the proper stones is part of the skill of any builder.

How do you choose which 'stones' to use as you build your relationship with the God of Jesus?

BUILDERS: Builders have a plan and know their materials.

What does this parable say about the builders (religious leaders) of Jesus' day? In rejecting Jesus' understanding of God, what 'stones' were being rejected?

KINGDOM OF GOD: The main task that Jesus saw for himself in becoming one of us was to bring to us a full revelation of the kingdom of God.

Why did Jesus' revelation cause such hostility for some, and eager anticipation for others? Are there any of your beliefs of Jesus' understanding of God challenged by this parable? If so, what are they?

PRODUCE: To produce is to combine labor and raw materials into something. The vineyard produced fruit, and the tenant's role was to produce a harvest for the owner.

What went wrong? How was it going to be corrected in this parable? What raw materials are in this parable are you able to use to produce a harvest for the vineyard owner?

FALLS: To fall is to drop from a height.

How or who is falling in v. 44?

BROKEN: To be broken is to be rendered unusable.

What is rendered unusable in this parable? Does this parable 'break' anything for you?

CRUSHED: To crush is to smash something into many pieces.

What is smashed in this parable?

CHIEF PRIESTS: In the time of Jesus the head of each priestly family held the title of chief priest. The chief priests were under the high priest of the temple. These people had the task of teaching and maintaining the religious practices.

What aspect of this role might enable the chief priests to feel justified in their response to Jesus? Could they honestly feel that they needed to reject Jesus' understanding of God? Why?

PHARISEES: Pharisees were lay people who took their religious practices very seriously and were seen as examples of the right kind of living. They hovered around Jesus, listening to his teachings and watching what he was doing.

Why do you think they were doing this? Could their self-understanding be a stumbling block? What self-understanding gives you a cause to stumble, if any?

AFRAID: The high priests and Pharisees were afraid of arresting Jesus because of his influence on the people who thought he was a prophet.

Do you think their reluctance came from the fact that they also thought Jesus was a prophet, or could there be another motive?

PROPHET: A prophet was always a sign that God was present to the people. In their level of understanding, the lack of a prophet signaled that God had withdrawn and was leaving them to their own devices.

What implications would a prophet have for this study?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 21:33-46 // Mk. 12:1-12; Lk. 20:9-19; Mt. 21:33 // Is. 5:2; Mt. 21:39 // Heb. 13:12; Mt. 21:42 // Dan. 2:45; Ps. 118:22; Is. 28:16; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:31; 1 Pt. 2:4-7; Mt. 21:42 // Ps. 118: 22-23; Mt. 21:43 // Rom. 11:11;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 5:1-7; Ps. 80 9, 12-16, 19-20; Phil. 4:6-9; Mt. 21: 33-43

Revised Common Lectionary: Ex. 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Ps. 19; Phil. 3: 4-14; Mt. 21: 33-46;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

"As a result of the war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed. I feel at this moment more anxiety than ever before, even in the midst of war. God grant that my suspicions may prove groundless." Abraham Lincoln. Pg. 161. Sherwin, Bryon L. Golems Among Us. Chicago. Ivan R. Dee. 2004.

Once I saw fresh graffiti chalked clearly on the pavement in front of the homeless. It said, "I watch how foolishly man guards his nothing—thereby keeping us out. Truly God is hated here." (I returned to copy the quote exactly because it felt both prophetic and poetic at the same time.) I can only imagine what kind of life experience enabled some person to write in such a cutting but truthful way. I understood anew why Jesus seemed to think that the expelled ones had a head start in understanding his message. Usually they have been expelled from what was unreal anyway—the imperial systems of culture, which always create those who are "in" and those who are "out," victors and victims. In God's reign "everything belongs," even the broken and poor parts. Until we have admitted this in our own soul, we will usually perpetuate exclusionary systems and dualistic thinking in the outer world of politics and class, and sometimes even in the church. Richard Rohr: *Everything Belongs*, p. 16

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." - Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Bottom-line, our way of life is based too much upon greed. We live believing that whatever we can attain, providing it is done lawfully, is ours by right and that the accumulation of excess is itself a sign of success. Everything within our culture exalts that idea and thus greed, like cancer, continues to grow. Crassly put, we try to suck as much out of life as we can get. The fact that others get less, are weak or have less access to the good life is not important. Then, after we have what we want, we want peace, we want to be protected, we feel enraged that anyone would dare take from us what is ours. But the problem is that we took from someone else and we are taking more than our share. There can be no peace without justice. [Fr. Ron Rolheiser June 1, 1987 \(Note the date\)](#)

Right now, this very second, this very moment that you spend reading these words is 'new'. How you choose to be a steward of that 'new slate' is up to you. My fervent prayer is that I never take for granted that gift of 'newness' and that I do all in his power granted to me to cherish the potential of 'all things new'. - Katherine Walden

A tower in a vineyard provided security against intruders and pests, particularly during the grape harvest, and it offered a shady, cool place to rest, no doubt a needed relief for harvesters and grape treaders. Walsh, Carey Ellen. [God's Vineyard](#). Bible Review, Aug. 1998. Pages 43f.

The absolute desire of 'having more' encourages the selfishness that destroys communal bonds among the children of God. It does so because the idolatry of riches prevents the majority from sharing the goods that the Creator has made for all, and in the all-possessing minority it produces an exaggerated pleasure in these goods." - Archbishop Oscar Romero, "

The greedy one gathered all the cherries, while the simple one tasted all the cherries in one. Nepo, Mark. *The Book of Awakening*. Berkeley, CA. Conari Press. 2000. Page 47.

Greed separates us from our understanding of the world as God's gift -- something to cherish and something to protect and to steward carefully. It separates us from our brothers and sisters as we gather unto ourselves alone, separating ourselves from within ourselves; we become an alienated person and finally, can separate us from God. Bp. Gumbleton

There is enough in this world for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed. Gandhi

To a nation bent on violence, anyone who claims to be speaking for God's kingdom and who advocates non-violent means as the way to it is making a very deep and dangerous political statement. - N.T. Wright

21.33–46: Parable of the vineyard (Mk 12.1–12; Lk 20.9–19). Gos. Thom. 65. 33: Vineyard, a reworking of the earlier parable in Isa 5.1–2, 7; see 20.1–16n. Tenants, chief priests and Pharisees (see 21.45). 34: Slaves, prophets of Israel (22.3). 37: His son, Jesus (21.41,43; see 7.16–20n.). 39: Out of the vineyard, Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem's walls (27.32–34; Mk 15.20; Lk 23.26–33; Jn 19.17; cf. Heb 13.12–13); executions occurred outside the walls of Jerusalem. 41: 8.11; Acts 13.46. The leaders condemn themselves. 42: Ps 118.22–23, also from the Hallel prayer (see 21.9n.); cf. Acts 4.11; 1 Pet 2.7. 43: People that produces the fruits, followers of Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles. 46: Prophet, see 21.11. There is nothing surprising about this contention—although later rabbinic sources claimed that prophecy had ceased centuries earlier, Josephus and others suggest a widespread belief that prophecy continued through the late Second Temple period. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#) Pg. 39.

Brands are marks that owners put on their property, often by painful means, and we are in perilous territory when our self-image, and even our self-worth, is founded on which brands and labels we can afford to purchase and display. Pg. 44 Kathleen Norris Hart, Patrick. [A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century](#). Kalamazoo, MI. Cistercian Pub. 2006.

If I can do no more, let my name stand among those who are willing to bear ridicule and reproach for the truth's sake, and so earn some right to rejoice when the victory is won. - Louisa May Alcott

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 192-196. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs. 152-156. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2001. Pgs. 150-154. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)