

Sermon for The 5th Sunday in Lent

Date: April 7, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 43:16-21

Epistle Reading: Philippians 3:4b-14

Gospel Reading: Luke 20:1-26

Sermon Text: Luke 20:1-26

Sermon Title: Killer Given Life

Introit: Psalm 3:3-6; Antiphon: Psalm 3:8

Hymns:

LSB 909 – Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation

LSB 912 – Christ Is Our Cornerstone

LSB 644 – The Church's One Foundation

Distribution:

LSB 420 – Christ, the Life of All the Living

LSB 433 – Glory Be to Jesus

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Text: Luke 20:1-26

One day Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple courtyard and telling them the Good News. The chief priests, the experts in Moses' Teachings, and the leaders came up to him. They asked him, "Tell us, what gives you the right to do these things? Who told you that you could do this?"

Jesus answered them, "I too have a question for you. Tell me did John's right to baptize come from heaven or from humans?"

They talked about this among themselves. They said, "If we say, 'from heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' If we say, 'from humans,' everyone will stone us to death. They are convinced that John was a prophet." So they answered that they didn't know who gave John the right to baptize.

Jesus told them, "Then I won't tell you why I have the right to do these things." Then, using this illustration, Jesus spoke to the people:

"A man planted a vineyard, leased it to vineyard workers, and went on a long trip. "At the right time he sent a servant to the workers to obtain from them a share of the grapes from the vineyard, but the workers beat the servant and sent him back with nothing. So he sent a different servant. The workers beat him, treated him shamefully, and sent him back with nothing. Then he sent a third servant, but they injured this one and threw him out of the vineyard.

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What should I do? I will send my son whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.'

"When the workers saw him they talked it over among themselves. They said, 'This is the heir. Let's kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will destroy these workers and give the vineyard to others."

Those who heard him said, "That's unthinkable!"

Then Jesus looked straight at them and asked, "What then does this Scripture verse mean: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?"

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken. If that stone falls on anyone it will crush them."

The experts in Moses' Teachings and the chief priests wanted to arrest him right there, but they were afraid of the people. They knew that he had directed this illustration at them.

So they watched for an opportunity to send out some spies. The spies were to act like sincere religious people. They wanted to catch him saying the wrong thing so that they could hand him over to the governor.

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Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

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Grace, peace and mercy be yours in Jesus' name. Amen.

You probably remember Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ." It produced a lot of controversy when it was released. One of those controversial issues, maybe the most controversial, is whether or not this film is accusing the Jews of killing Jesus. When this question was put to Gibson he correctly said yes, the Jews killed Jesus because there weren't any Norwegians there! (Or Germans, or French, or whoever.)

While that answer is correct it is not complete. There is more to it. So in answering this question, Gibson also quickly adds that while yes, the Jews killed Jesus, even more the guilt of killing Jesus falls on himself, on his sin, on his guilt. The Jews are not more guilty or more to blame than he is. Jesus was on the cross paying for the sins of all people.

Of course saying that is one thing believing that's another. If you believe that then when you heard the parable that Jesus told, in the Gospel reading, you should have thought, "Those wicked tenants that killed the Son, they are me." We generally don't think that way because we don't like to think that way.

The context of Jesus telling this parable includes: God had chosen these people to be His own. He had brought them out of Egypt with His power. He had blessed them on their journey, and had placed them in the Promised Land, the Vineyard. The problem was they were not giving back to Him His due.

They were turning to the false gods of the land, gods that gave them personal profit rather than protection from the owner, the Creator, of the land. So God sent prophets to His people. Prophets like: Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so many others. He sent them so that His people would apologize, turn back to Him and believe, but they would not listen. Over and over God sent His prophets, and the people mistreated them, rejected them and killed most of them. Now finally God sent His Son, His beloved Son and they were going to kill Him too.

Jesus asks, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?"

They answered, "He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to someone else."¹

That has been done. God has given the Church to others, to the Gentiles, to us. The Church is the now new Israel of God, the new children of God. We now live in the Promised Land of the Church. We are to work for the harvest so that on the

1 Luke 20:16

Last Day of work we will enter His home and enjoy the great banquet of celebration called the Feast of the Lamb which has no end.

That still sounds an awful lot like “the Jews killed Jesus” doesn’t it? Just like with the movie, while that explanation is correct it is not complete. There is more to it than that because this parable applies to you and me as well.

Just as God chose the people of Israel to be His own He has also chosen us to be His own. We did not choose Him, He chose us. As they passed through the waters of the Red Sea so we, as we just saw happen, pass through the waters of Holy Baptism. There we have been rescued from our enemy and set free from slavery to sin. God has placed us in His vineyard, the Church. He has blessed us and prospered us so much.

The question is are we like those wicked tenants? Are we acting like Christian in what we say and do? Are we keeping God’s good gifts to ourselves, for ourselves, think only about what we can get and what power we can have? Are we turning to those false gods?

If we’re serious when we say ‘it was my sins that crucified Jesus; If we’re serious when we say my sins inflicted His punishment,’ then we are admitting that we are the evil tenants. We have the words of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, and the reading and preaching of God’s Holy Word ever available to us. Are we listening, or do we kill those words as they enter our ears, before they get to our heart? We have to admit that if we’re going to put ourselves into this parable there is only one place we fit.

“What will the owner of the vineyard do to them (*to us*)?

He will destroy these workers and give the vineyard to others.²”

The people there that day, face-to-face with Jesus, were convicted by this parable. They got it. Jesus was talking about them. They answered “Surely not!” That’s no doubt how we’d answer too! Unworthy as we are, we believe God would never condemn us. He’ll always have mercy on us. God would never get angry with us. Are you sure?

The parable is clear, God is not going to simply ignore sin. There is punishment for it. The question is how do we escape such punishment? Jesus gives the answer:

2 Luke 20:15-16 (*Paraphrased*)

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone it will crush him.³”

Now that’s maybe a little cryptic, but doesn’t really sound like good news. The thing is it is good news, because it makes an important distinction between those who are broken and those who are crushed. While both get hurt one is permanent and one is not.

The stone that Jesus is talking about is Himself and people are affected by Him in one of two ways. First are those who “fall on that stone and are broken.” Jesus and His cross are a stumbling block to all who want to be self-sufficient, who want to save themselves, who want to think that we’re good enough on our own. The Jesus contradicts all of that. The truth is, try as we might we cannot be good enough. We are not able. We do not and cannot love God with all our heart and soul and strength, and we do not and cannot love our neighbor as our self. We can’t. We might try. We just can’t! We keep thinking about ourselves first! We are the wicked tenants.

That’s hard to admit. It’s a stumbling block for us! The problem is, with God it’s all or nothing. You’re either broken or you’re not. If you’re broken you’re a failure. So we take our seats with the failures with the wicked tenants, with the broken and condemned, with the beggars and the sinners, with the prostitutes and the tax collectors, and we cry out with them, “Lord, have mercy on us!”

Once broken by that cross, in that way, the cross then becomes the way of healing, the way of salvation. God humbles us so that He can lift us up, He lowers us so He can raise us up, He breaks us so that He can heal us up. That lifting, raising and healing all take place when we are forgiven.

We look to Jesus and say, “Lord, have mercy on us.”

Jesus responds, “Father, forgive them.⁴”

With that God no longer see us as wicked tenants but now as faithful ones. Not because we are, but because we are forgiven. What the wicked tenants said comes true! “Let us kill the Son, so that the inheritance will be ours.⁵”

3 Luke 20:18

4 Luke 23:34

5 Luke 20:14

Jesus' death put His New Testament, His New Contract, into effect giving us His inheritance through the forgiveness of our sins. All by God's grace and love. Because He does not quit searching for us and being merciful to us, wicked though we may be.

What's the alternative to stumbling and being broken? What is the other way people are affected by the cross? "To be crushed." To not be broken and repairable by the cross, but to be crushed by it. Crushed by its weight. Crushed because we try to carry it ourselves, and pay by ourselves the price that is too much for us to pay.

It may be hard to admit that we are failures, but worse by far is to be crushed under the burden of perfection. To come before God on our own and think that He will not destroy us because we're good enough on our own. God is love but He is also righteous. He is not love sometimes, and the Just Punisher at other times. He is always both all the time. So just like in His justice and righteousness He will not simply overlook our sins, or excuse them, or ignore them, so also in His love He paid the price for them Himself. On the cross we see both divine justice and divine love on display for all the world to see, so that "all who believe in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life."⁶

How do you get signed up on that contract? You need a signature, but not yours. Your signature on this contract would be worthless. Someone else needs to sign. We saw that happen three times today. God signed His name. God put His name on these three children the same way He put His name on easy of you here. He signed the contract. A contract that demands payment must be made. That [the Baptismal Font] is where the contract is signed. That [the Cross] is where the bill is paid and the contract is fulfilled.

Once the Son was thrown out of the vineyard and killed what did the Father do with His Son? That question is not asked in the parable but it's important. He raised Him from the dead. The very thing that will happen in less than a week from when Jesus told this parable.

It would all be accomplished. It would all be finished. Our redemption, our atonement, our forgiveness would be won by the death of God's Son at the hands of us the wicked tenants. Then as He so often does God used rejection and evil for His good purposes. He uses death to defeat death.

So is there any hope for us the wicked tenants of God's Vineyard the Church? Is there any hope that when the owner of the vineyard returns He will not see us as those who killed His Son but as ones for whom His Son died? There is hope.

He will raise us broken ones, and give us His inheritance. In fact He is doing that right now. Here we come before Him broken in repentance as sinners, and He is raising us up in forgiveness. You watched it happen right there [at the Baptismal font]. There He gives us a seat at His table where He feeds us with the food of faith, life and forgiveness. Making all things new.

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”⁷

Thanks be to God!

Amen.