

Luke 20: 9-19

Lent 5; April 7 & 8, 2019

“God is not the God of second chances.” God’s holiness will not allow that to happen. When you hear that sentence, do you think it is true? Or, does it sound better to say that God is the God of second chances? After all, the Bible is full of all kinds of people who were given a second chance by God. Noah was found drunk by his sons; Moses murdered an Egyptian; Rahab committed prostitution; and David hired someone for murder and committed adultery. Then there are those in the New Testament: Zaccheaus, the tax collector, who overtaxed people out of personal greed; Peter, who denied Christ three times; and the list could go on. Yet, in spite of their illegal and immoral behavior, God gave them a second chance. Of course, God gives people a second chance. Sounds good, right? Neither of those two statements are true.

That sentence – *“God is a God of second chances”* – is not a comfort at all. Think about what is said by that sentence. God doesn’t just give us a second chance to *“get it right.”* He doesn’t just give us a 3rd chance, or a 4th chance or a 100th chance to get it right. It doesn’t matter how many chances that God gives us, we are always going to fail. It’s one of those phrases that sounds good, and even sounds like it is from the Bible, but it’s so far from the truth. Without Jesus, even our best intentions and best efforts are still filthy rags in the sight of our holy God. It still leaves us in our sins. The conclusion that we can draw from that sentence will always be the same - *“Am I out of chances?”* It’s like trying to roll a big log up a hill, only to get near the top, and have it come rolling back down again. Every time you try, you just can’t get it there.

Thankfully, because of God’s overwhelming love and grace toward us, he offers us something better than a second chance – his Son. That’s the point of the parable that Jesus tells this morning. Jesus tells this story on Tuesday of Holy Week. The city of Jerusalem had welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday. The religious leaders were furious and wanted to kill Jesus. So, what does Jesus do? He tells them this parable.

In this *Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, it’s pretty easy to identify who is represented by the different people in the parable. The owner of the vineyard is God the Father. For centuries God had used the metaphor of a vineyard to describe all that he had done for the people of Israel, the Jews. He had given them everything—a beautiful land, his law, miraculous protection, and special promises. Then he handed the care of the vineyard to tenants. The wicked tenants are the spiritual leaders of God’s people. The servants who were sent to collect the owner’s percentage of the crops are God’s prophets of old. And the landowner’s son is Jesus. Put yourself in the shoes of Jesus’ original audience. It wouldn’t be hard for the Jewish leaders to understand that he was talking about them.

There was only one conclusion that those who were listening could draw. What kind of landowner would do this? ***“When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!”*** There’s an old phrase that you might be familiar with: *“Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”* When someone tricks you, you’re supposed to learn your lesson the first time around. If they fool you twice, well, shame on you for giving them a second chance. These wicked tenants beat not just one servant, but three of them. The first time this happened, it should have been enough. He had ample evidence that these tenants were scoundrels and thieves. So the standard course of action should have been to fight fire with fire. At the very least, bring in the authorities and let them deal with these criminals. These tenants should have been booted out of the vineyard. Any reasonable person would have done that. Three strikes, but they still weren’t out. There laid three of his servants, with blackened eyes and broken bones, scarred by cuts and abrasions. So, what does he do? ***‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’*** You look at that and can’t help but say: *“Seriously.”* Doesn’t he foresee the danger for his Son? Absolutely. Yet, he sends him anyway.

Do you hear the compassion in the words of the Father? What’s the most astounding about this story is the patience of the owner. This parable, at its core, is a story about the heart of God—the God of second chances, and third chances, and, yes, fourth chances and even more. We see a God, who not only gives us another chance, but guarantees us that we don’t have to worry about how many chances that he will give us. Jesus is showing us the unreasonable, illogical, super-human patience of our gracious God. Our God is a Father of compassion.

The Father wasn't dumb. He knew he was sending his Son to sure and certain death. He knew they'd take him outside the city and nail him to a tree. He knew it all. But the Father's heart led him to do it anyway. Do you see what that means to you? Do you see just how incredible it is that God has not given up on you? He does not say, *"Fool me twice, shame on me,"* strip you of his blessings, and kick you out of his kingdom. He doesn't tell us to try a little harder so that you he might give you another chance. No, he says that, even though we are foolish and often find ourselves failing our God, he doesn't give up on us. You see, that's what God grace does.

Yes, God's patience will eventually come to an end. There will be judgment for those who rejected him. In just a few short days, the people who said, **"God forbid,"** will say, **"crucify him, crucify him."** God's judgment would come. Those, who would reject the Son, would fall on **"that stone, be broken to pieces;"** and **"will be crushed."**

But that's not why Jesus came. That's not why the Father sent his Son. This incredible Father wants to call you His child. We saw that once again through the water of baptism today. You see that little girl is not just my granddaughter, your daughter. She is God's daughter. Jesus' blood will wash her clean for all the times that she will sin in her life as it does with us. That's what God does. He forgives not just once, not just twice or a thousand times; he just forgives. He keeps no record of how many chances he's given you. In the end, it isn't about how many times we mess up, but how constant and unwavering the Father's love is for us in Jesus. Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven. Amen.