

## Matthew 21:33-43

Pentecost 20 – October 18, 2020

Henry Ford was a determined man. He was always trying to keep one step ahead of his customers. One day he came up with the idea of producing a new kind of engine which we know as the V-8. He wanted to build this engine with the entire eight cylinders cast into one block. Ford was eager to turn this idea into reality. He had some men draw up the sketches, and he presented those sketches to the engineers. As the engineers studied the drawings, they all came up with the same conclusion. Their visionary boss just didn't seem to understand the fundamental principles of engineering. So, a group of them came back to Ford and told him that it was simply impossible to build an engine with the entire eight cylinders cast in one block.

But Ford was determined to have this idea of his turned into reality. He said to them: *"Produce it anyway."* *"But it's impossible."* Yet Ford replied: *"Go ahead,"* he ordered them, *"and stay on the job until you succeed, no matter how much time is required."* For the next six months they struggled with drawing after drawing, design after design. Nothing. Another six months. Nothing. Yet, Ford was determined. He kept telling them to keep going. So, they kept going. Eventually, Ford's determination paid off. The Ford Motor Company did build the V-8 engine.

God was determined to fix the problem of sin in this world. For man, this would be an impossible task. This morning, in our text, we see the determination of God to love this world no matter the cost. We also see God loving people who didn't want to love him back.

Jesus begins: **"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."** As you look at this parable, you can't help but be amazed at the amount of ingratitude and violence that the renters showed toward this landowner, who shows an incredible amount of love and patience toward them. This landowner not only plants the vineyard, he also puts a wall around it, digs a winepress and builds a watch tower to protect it from wild and animals and thieves. After spending all this money and effort to make a showcase vineyard, he rents this incredible vineyard to some farmers. Their task was simple. It was their responsibility to care for this vineyard. For their hard work, the landowner would let them keep a generous amount of grapes for themselves. They would be well compensated for their work.

Who is this vineyard? Who are these tenants? To answer those questions, we look at our first lesson from Isaiah. The vineyard is the children of Israel. The tenants were the religious leaders of them. God had given his people everything. Even though they did not deserve his love, he continued to love them century after century. He continued to send his prophets to them. Yet, how do they respond to this love of God? **"When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. 'The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.'** How could they do that? Why would they do that? Not only do they not give the landowner the portion that was due him, they beat and kills his servants. Didn't they know that this is going to go badly for them?

What does the land owner do? He would have had every right to contact the authorities, who at his request would send a heavily armed company of trained men to storm the vineyard, arrest the violent men who mistreated his servants and bring them to justice. So, what does he do? He chooses not to exact vengeance. He chooses to set aside his anger and he sends more servants. He chooses to stop at nothing to win his people back. Yet, their response is the same. **"Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way."** But Jesus doesn't stop the story there. **"Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said."** Again and again God had given his people an opportunity to love him. Again and again they rejected that opportunity.

One day in 1954, Art received a call from his friend named Walt. Walt wanted to take him for a ride into the country. Walt was a dreamer. He had big plans. They stopped the car and got out. All Art could see was an uninhabited expanse of land. A few horses were grazing. A few old shacks remained. But Walt saw something different. He described to his friend what he was going to build there. He was going to build the happiest place on earth. It was going to take Walt all of his money to build this place that he was going to call – Disneyland. He was giving his friend the chance to buy some of the land surrounding this project. But Art thought: *who would drive 45 minutes out of Los Angeles to visit this crazy*

*project?* Walt tried to persuade his friend to buy the land. Walt could see it all in his mind --- the Disneyland Railroad, Main Street, Sleeping Beauty's Castle, Adventureland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland. Walt promised him that in a few years, the land would be worth 20 times more than what he was going to pay for it. But Art couldn't see it, and passed on the opportunity of a life time. And so Art Linkletter turned down the chance to buy all the land around Disneyland.

The children of Israel turned down more than an opportunity of a lifetime. They turned down eternal life with Jesus. Instead of listening to God's prophets, they killed them, they beat them and drove them away. Standing there, listening to Jesus' parable were the teachers of the law and the elders. Religious leaders who should have been pointing everyone to Jesus as the Savior of the world. Instead their faith produced bad fruit. They were all about keeping rules and making new ones. They may have looked good on the outside, but on the inside they had a rotten heart. Did they understand what Jesus was accusing them of? Yes. In the verses following our text, Matthew writes: **"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet."**

Not the happiest parable, right? Or is it? It depends who the focus is on in the parable. You see that the focus of the parable is not the tenants, but it is on the landowner. That even though the leaders continued to try to lead the people away from Jesus, he still loved them. He is still calling them to repentance. In a few days following this parable, God will show the world just how far he is willing to go to save them. He will send his Son to be killed on a cross to pay for this world's sins. He wants to be the cornerstone of their faith and life. He wants to give us as well.

Let's give thanks that we have a God who is determined to save us. We have a God who is willing to stop at nothing to save us. May God help all of us to be his fruit-bearing believers. Amen.