

Matthew 21:33-43

Pentecost 20 – October 8 & 9, 2023

There are things that seem to make no sense. How many of you have done these things.

- Throwing away the box to your microwaveable meal and then fishing it out of the garbage can to read the instructions.
- Checking the fridge, seeing there's no food that you like, and then checking it again five minutes later to see if anything has changed.
- Accumulating hundreds of dollars' worth of stuff in your cart when online shopping and then not buying it because the shipping is \$5.99.
- Stopping a microwave one second before the beeping starts.
- Getting your gas to round up to a double zero.
- Refusing to eat your food until you find the perfect show to watch.
- Tilting the video game controller because you think it helps you play the game better.

I think that we all have done some of those things in our life. On the more serious side, there are times when what God tells us to do something that just doesn't make sense to us. Why would God command Adam and Eve not to eat from one tree in the Garden of Eden? Not only did the fruit look appetizing, they liked the idea of increasing their knowledge by eating of that tree. After all, God was holding something back from. (At least, that's what Satan said to them.) Then we see just the opposite in Noah. It really didn't make sense for Noah to build a 300' boat in his backyard. Although it didn't make any sense, Noah did it and he and his family were saved. When God told Joshua to march around the walls of Jericho for 7 days and the walls of the city would come tumbling down, the walls came tumbling down.

What do we do when life just doesn't make sense? Illness strikes. A job is lost. Friendships fade. Uncertainty looms. Whether the gray-haired believer facing cancer or the college student burdened by the pressures of the future, crisis and suffering have a way of shaking even the most confident Christian. We may know that God is in control of all things at all times in all places, yet we often feel frustrated because we don't understand what he is up to.

That is what our parable is about this morning. God wants us to know that even in those times that make no sense, he is still under control. We have a God who exercises the ultimate patience with his people. Jesus begins to tell the parable. There was a landowner that decided to plant a vineyard. This was no small or inexpensive process. He took good care in shaping the land and getting all of the stones in the ground out of the way. He built a wall around the vineyard to keep all of the animals in the area from eating his crop and vines. He built a watchtower looking over his vineyard so that people could stand guard over it day or night. He built a new wine press so that the grapes could be processed right there on the land.

This process could take up to four years for the vineyard would produce fruit. In the culture of that day, the wealthy land owner often would live some distance from their estates. So, the owner would find tenants to work the land for them. They would be expected to care for the vines, water them and doing anything to help the vineyard to produce grapes. They would be paid well for their work. But a portion of the grapes and the wine would go to the land owner. Yet, how these tenants would treat the servants was appalling. Jesus says: **“they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.”**

In the Middle East personal honor was held in high esteem. The landowner 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 had mistreated his servants and bring them to justice. The abusing of his servants was an insult to the land owner. He would be expected, indeed honor bound, to deal with this matter.

Yet what would happen next, would shock even the people to whom Jesus was telling this parable. Matthew writes: **“Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. ‘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.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ‘Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’”**

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied.” They were stunned that this landowner was so incredibly patient with his tenants. There was only one conclusion that they could draw. *They deserve to be put to death.*

The original hearers of this parable understood what Jesus was saying. The chief priests and the Pharisees recognized He was speaking against them. They knew He was comparing them to the wicked tenants, and He was warning them that the Kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to another people if they didn't repent from their ways. Century after century they would kill God's prophets. Year after year, God's people would be led to hear about other gods. Again and again, God would call them to repentance and show his grace. Yet, even here the landowner – God – would send His Son for even them.

Yet, God shows us his incredible patience for us. We may not be killing the servants, but we do not follow God in all things. Time after time, God calls us to repentance and forgives our sin. God shows incredible patience for us. He does that through the waters of Baptism, as we once again saw this morning. When Jesus speaks these words in today's text, he has the cross in mind. In just a few short days, the Jesus who speaks these words, will give the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world – for your sins and mine.

That's the point of this parable. God wants us to see his incredible patience. It doesn't make sense, does it? Why would God do this? The simple answer: because he loves us. He does this purely out of his grace. That's what Jesus wants us to see. 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 we give thanks to him for his amazing grace. Amen.