



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

17th Sunday after Trinity ~ October 4th 2020
HARVEST FESTIVAL SERVICES

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

We have Church services with social distancing, and also, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries. We want people to have a genuine choice. We are also thinking about how other aspects of church life and people's needs can be met. Ideas and suggestions welcome.

St Peter's: Sundays 8am & 11am ~ Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's: Sundays 9.15am

St John's: Sundays 9:30am ~ Tuesdays 10am

Please Note:

Except for medical reasons (and those under 11) we are now required to wear a face mask in our church buildings.

Prayers for this Week

Yours, O God, is the vineyard and its harvest, yours the kingdom of justice and peace. You call your people to tend its growth. Bless the work entrusted to our hands, that we may offer you an abundance of just works, a rich harvest of peace. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

God of peace, sending your word vulnerable to a violent world: take us from the closed fist of death; reveal to us the open arms of love that we might stumble and fall into your hands; through Jesus Christ, our victim and our saviour.

Amen.

Reading: Matthew 21 v33-46

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Meditation

As we have before, let's play with Jesus's parables, for surely that is why he chooses to teach with vivid stories. So how about a Global Parable of the Vineyard for the 21st Century. I hope you will have a similar play.

"There was a cosmic landowner who planted a planet. He gave it a rich variety of landscapes, he gave it an uncountable number of species, he gave it the intellectual tools of science, economics and engineering to understand and nurture it. Then he gave the species made in his image stewardship of the planet, and went to another dimension. When the time came to review the planet's sustainability, and to hold the tenants to account, the landowner found that many of the species were in terminal decline on the road to extinction; that many of the resources had been squandered on specious luxury or expended in competitive rivalry; and that even the climate was changing the landscape. The tenants told the landowner's messengers that there was plenty of time and all they had seen was progress. So the landowner sent messengers again exhorting the tenants to use their eyes and their minds to realise what was happening, and their hands and their mouths to change the future direction. But, the tenants dismissed this as fake news and refused to see or hear, to study or think, and so did not change. So the cosmic landowner....."

And we come back to the ending later.

Let's tell the original story again, but this time from the tenants view.

"We believe in God, but sometimes it feels as if he has left us to it. We know God provides, protects, nurtures and inspires us. Although deep down we know we are called to account for our actions and our ways of life on a daily basis, we fondly assume that the reckoning is far distant, so the time to change does not have to be now. When we receive glimpses of our creator in our communal life, in the world around us, or in worship, we ignore it and cast it aside. When the same causes are made more explicit through prophets, we dismiss them as madmen; through priests who we dismiss as self-serving and mad about status; or through Kings and rulers from whom we either seize power for ourselves, or leave them to get on with it, bowing to inevitabilities. But then the landowner raised the stakes by sending his son and....."

And, again, we will come back to the ending later.

So, a last retelling of the basic story, from the tenants point of view in a cosmic world. "We have a landowner, who is now so distant in time and space, that we doubt if he ever existed. We rejoice in the diversity of species, we are grateful for the rich resources, animal, vegetable, mineral that are at our disposal. We recognise that we are unique among the species in having both intellectual enquiry to analyse, and technical ability to change the world we live in. When we get our conscience pricked, we dismiss our anxiety. When we see the inequalities in our world, we turn to what is familiar. When we see technology used in ways that pollute, concentrate power, or squander resources, we carry on in our own lives, and ignore the implications for other people or other species.

We use the tools of the great disciplines of science, economics and engineering for our own ends, and ignore findings, research and data that do not fit our desired agenda. So we are proud to have kicked into touch psychological, theological and scientific tools, so we can carry on. So now the landowner will.....”

And at last we must now face the end, and its possibilities for each scenario.

Perhaps we should have a vote to see which ending fits for you;

1. God sent his Son to put an end to the tenants, perhaps by a virus, perhaps by the breakdown of the ecosystem, perhaps by internecine struggle between the tenants.
2. God sent his Son, who took control, organised the tenants on a better basis, made them listen and obey, and they all lived happily ever after.
3. God said, I have already sent my Son, Jesus Christ, and this generation listens no more than those 2000 years ago, so there is nothing more I can do, only to hope they recall his visit, with his consequential death.
4. God sent his Son again, and they crucified him again.
5. God and his Son called it a day.

and there are of course many other answers worthy of consideration.

Now, my picture of Jesus’s ministry does include the idea that he used his good stories many times, perhaps in slightly different ways as he wandered around Galilee and up to Jerusalem speaking to different audiences. The placing of this account in Matthew’s gospel in Holy Week in the Temple precincts immediately before telling of Jesus’s arrest, trial and crucifixion, is to draw attention to Jesus being in the line of the prophets. God’s message and intentions have not changed, but now are to be brought in person. And when this happens, he and it will be rejected.

If we are not to continue to make that same rejection, how do we behave as the tenants of our world? How do we make the risk God took in sending his Son worthwhile? How do we give meaning not only to the Son’s death, but his resurrection too?

So, rewrite the vineyard story with your lives; farm the land so that each year there is a sustainable crop; enjoy the view from the watch tower, perhaps make a gateway in the walls; create tasty vintage wine in harmony with our fellow tenants; welcome prophets and slaves and messengers and the Son. And if we do that, then we can drink a toast of fine wine to the landlord, celebrate and enjoy the fruits of the earth and our labour, and the Son will be drinking with us.

God bless, Andrew

Harvest Prayers

We thank God for the world he has made, and for all his love and care.
For the warmth of the sun; For the rain that makes things grow; For the woods and the fields; For the sea and the sky; For the flowers and the animals; For families and holidays;
For all your gifts, we give you thanks and praise.

**O God, you have created us hands and mind and heart,
to find satisfaction in hard and skilful work,
and to delight in sharing its harvest.**

**With all who labour we offer ourselves to be the work of your hands
in making a world where no one will be exhausted by toil that is fruitless;
but all may enjoy to the full what their own hands have produced.**

In the name of Christ, who is the Lord of the Harvest.

Amen.

Father, through Jesus Christ we give you thanks and praise for all gifts you give us. For birth and life and strength of body; for safety and shelter and food; For sight and hearing and the beauty of nature; for words and music and the power of thought; For work and leisure and the joy of achieving; for conscience and will and depth of feeling; For grace and truth in Jesus Christ; for the gifts of the Spirit and the hope of life in you.

We give you thanks, and praise you.

God of evolving diversity, made known in seed and soil, and the wonder of animal worlds: free our hearts from the anxiety that knows only domination; open our being to learn from the life with which we share this earth; through Jesus Christ the Lord of the Harvest.

Amen.

Here, O creator God, we look in wonder at all you have made. But remind us: the earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. And remind us: the earth, and all that is in it, belongs to you. You confront us with such beauty, and such power, and such responsibility. Teach us, Creator God, to respect our planet, our home, to live carefully within the web of life, and to give you the glory.

Amen.

Gracious One, reaching our need, overcoming our alienation: give us a spirit of gratitude for the abundance of the earth. In all we eat and drink, free us from the consumption that destroys the roots of life; teach us to eat the living bread in whom all are hungers are satisfied by the life that gives of itself and is never consumed; through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Harvest.

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve the men and women throughout the world; who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands, this day their daily bread, and by our understanding and love give joy and peace.

Amen.

The earth had yielded its harvest; God, our God, has blessed us.

You visit the earth and water it; you make it very plenteous.

You soften the ground with showers; and bless the increase of it.

You crown the year with goodness; and your paths overflow with plenty.

The meadows are clothed with sheep; the valleys stand so thick with corn, they shout for joy and sing.

The earth had yielded its harvest; God, our God, has blessed us.