



Sunday 4th October 2026

18th Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21.33-end

‘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.

Other readings: Exodus 20.1–4, 7–9, 12–20

Psalms 19 [or 19.7–end]

Philippians 3.4b–14

Homily

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants is a deeply challenging story. It confronts those who occupy positions of responsibility in the Church with a stark reminder that we hold those positions in trust. Our roles, our status, our titles, are not badges of honour. They are not a reason for self-congratulation, an encouragement to think of ourselves as more important

than others. They do not confer on us any form of ownership of the Church or its life. To be responsible for God's people is, rather, to be called to be faithful to God, giving to God what is due to God, the fruit of the vineyard.

This message is especially underlined in the version of the story that we find in St Matthew's gospel. Verse 43 stands out. What has been entrusted to the tenants is not theirs, and they will be held to account for what they do with it. If the worst comes to the worst, what has been given can and will be taken away.

For St Matthew this may have been a reflection that had a bearing on the character of the early Christian community. At the time he was writing, Matthew's community was very likely trying to include both Jews and Gentiles and struggling with the tensions that arose from that. It may also have been faced with the emergence of a Rabbinic Judaism that had, by now, decisively rejected Christian claims about Jesus. This context doubtless raised questions about why the 'chosen' people had not, in any great numbers at least, accepted the Christian gospel. It also raised questions about how a community in which Jews and Gentiles were to be united as Christians. And if all of that is so, Matthew presents this story told by Jesus in the most uncompromising way. Those to whom the people of God had been entrusted, the Jewish religious leaders, had not been faithful, and the responsibility had been taken away from them and given to others.

This is not our context, of course, and to an extent it is only a reconstruction anyway. But it does resonate with today's church nonetheless.

The temptation to think of the church as ours, remains. We, like our spiritual forebears, can easily come to imagine our roles and responsibilities as more about status than duty, more about rights than responsibility, more about worldly success than spiritual fruit.

We, too, can be challenged by this parable. What we have is given to us on trust. We are answerable to God for what we do with it. And if we are not faithful, it can be taken away.

So what is the fruit that God looks for from the Church, the produce from the vineyard that we are called to care for in our own time?

Fortunately, Scripture gives us that answer plainly. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Or, put differently, the fruit that God desires is human lives and communities living in accordance with God's will and character.

One way of thinking about this is provided by the Anglican Communion's 'Five Marks of Mission'. These marks provide a helpful shorthand for checking that what we spend our

time doing in our churches is well-directed. They encourage us to: Tell people the good news about Jesus; to Teach people the Christian faith; to Tend those around us with loving service; to Transform communities and societies by working for justice and peace; and to Treasure God's creation.

So let's pray that we may be faithful in the responsibility that has been entrusted to us, and work to produce fruit in God's vineyard.

Conversation Questions

1. Do we ever fall into the trap of thinking of the church as belonging to us, and forgetting to be faithful to God?
2. What can we do to keep our focus on doing the things that God wants, and living the way that God commands?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

Or

*God, our judge and saviour,
teach us to be open to your truth
and to trust in your love,
that we may live each day
with confidence in the salvation which is given
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is incorporated in this service paper, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council, 2000. Scripture passage from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised) copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.