

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: October 8, 2023

A Christian Life and Church

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church. There are no words to describe how wonderful last night's dinner was. Thank you to everyone who participated in any way! Back to church, isn't that what Jesus is talking about?

For those who think Jesus was a meek and mild-mannered preacher, I want to take another look at the parables from the last four Sundays. These show that Jesus is anything but meek and mild. And if you ever wondered why a group of people would chant "Crucify him!" – it really begins here.

In case you haven't found the theme that Jesus has been expressing in the Gospels these last few Sundays, let us take a review. We began with Jesus talking about forgiveness. The king (who, no doubt, represents God) who forgives more than a lifetime of debt to a slave who then in turn does not forgive another who owes him. Thus, ultimately angering the king or should we say God.

Let us not forget that Jesus is aiming these stories directly at the elders and prestigious religious leaders of his time. He is directly confronting their bad behavior which they justify by hiding behind their heritage and lineage as leaders in the Hebrew faith. Jesus is telling the religious leaders in a rather blunt and possibly sarcastic way that God forgives them, yet they are not forgiving those who come to them, those they serve as religious leaders. They are not modeling God.

Next, we have the story of the workers and a full day's wage. Basically, Jesus telling those in authority that God chooses to whom he extends grace and that God values what those in authority deem worthless. Again, a little confrontational to those who are considered leaders. Jesus is explaining God sees peoples' struggles – the struggle is real, and everyone has value.

Then last week Jesus is again – in a very sneaky way - mocking the religious leaders with the tale of two sons. These two in reality represent those who have the same Davidic or prophetic lines as these leaders, the ones who so conveniently lean on their authority. In fact, those two sons or should we say the Hebrew lineage has been sinful and prideful, often testing God who is the true authority. Whose will is it? Yours or God's? And now today, a critique of the whole religious system. And if you listen closely you will hear Jesus tell them of his own future which, as we know, ends up in their hands.

In fact, this parable today is so prophetic that the leaders seem to miss the point. The parable begins with a situation that was business as usual in Roman-occupied Palestine. A landowner established a vineyard complete with a fence, a winepress, and even a watchtower. He then became an absentee landowner, returning to his own country. This happened often in the far-reaching territories of the Roman Empire.

Tenants were usually in charge of overseeing the productivity of the vineyard or crops and then paying their rent to the owner at harvest time, in the form of a share of the produce. So far, so good: business was working as usual. Then everything came apart!

When the owner's slaves arrived to collect his share of the produce, the tenants attacked them - even beating one and killing another. The owner of the vineyard

then simply sent another delegation of slaves to collect the rent. Hmm... this is not normal! Those slaves were treated even worse than the first. Surely by now the owner would send in troops or some form of armed enforcement for his rights!

And here it is: the prophecy, right in front of their faces. The landowner does not send troops, instead he sends his son, (did you catch that phrasing – the landowner sends his son) thinking by some logic that the thugs who had abused two delegations of slaves would realize their sins, repent and then respect the owner's son and heir. In parallel folly the tenants reason that if they kill the son, they will get his inheritance. Apparently unaware of how ridiculous this notion is, they kill the son.

Jesus is actually in the Jewish leader's territory, in their face, saying; you who lean on your lineage, are abusing God's people; you will kill the gift God has sent you – his son- who is asking you to repent and change your ways. I can imagine by now, those who are in charge of the Temple and the religious life have probably had it up to their necks of being told by some itinerate street prophet that everything they are doing is wrong and that they are not responding in a Godly manner.

And maybe today's parable was the last straw for many because Jesus describes the tenants as abusing the workers, even to death. And clearly describing again in a very subversive way, that the owner of the land (God) can choose another way and a more coherent and compassionate people to be in covenant with Him. God will choose those rejected by the Temple priests.

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.

What Jesus was proposing is what God desires of us and our continual battle to be. That even in today's church which is best described by Richard Rohr as *"Christianity is a lifestyle a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared and loving."*

Rohr also describes in no uncertain terms the same thing Jesus is describing to those with religious power in his own day as he continues: *"However, we made it into an established religion and all that goes with that and avoided the lifestyle change itself."*

And just like the Pharisees of Jesus' Day, Rohr finishes: *"One could be war-like, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain in most of Christian history and still believe that Jesus is one's personal lord and savior – the world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on earth is too great."*

Again, our scripture reminds us that although we often portray Jesus as a gentle, nonviolent person. He did confront the authorities, in a very blunt way. He was calling them to action, and calling them to change.

"To love and serve the Lord", which we say every Sunday, are not just words - they are actions. And maybe CTL can just become the church, the community, the place, where Jesus' type of Christianity can happen. That's up to you! Welcome to stewardship discernment. Amen.