

Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

'Let me sing for my beloved. My love song, concerning his vineyard.'

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Our Lord teaches us in a parable. It needs no great interpretation.

'There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard.'

For the Lord has planted His people, His only people, whom He has loved, first in Judea, then in the Empire of the Romans, then across all the Earth, even unto this far off land, across oceans.

'And he put a fence around it.'

For how could He not? In His steadfast mercy, did He not give unto us the Law, that we might be made wise, even unto salvation, guided forever by the Word of Almighty God, Who Himself is Truth. So He did, that we might be guarded, as by a hedge, against the manifold wickedness of the falseness of this world.

And, knowing our weakness. He set before us St. Michael, and all the angels, to protect us from the evil one, even as we pray. Glorious and mighty, these, the angels of heaven, sent to protect us, who are frail and broken, *for the Lord has put a fence around us*, for we are His vineyard, and He would not have us perish.

'And in it he dug a winepress.'

For if there be a vineyard, the fruit of the vineyard must be pressed if it is to become wine; if it is to become the blood of Christ. Should not the Church, which *no longer lives, but Christ lives in it*, therefore be crushed, even as the Lord was, that our blood might be His blood? That our suffering might be made His suffering? This the martyrs understood, and went forth before the lion, for they knew that their blood was the wine of joy that would be joined to the blood of

Christ, which in our Eucharist would become the medicine of immortality, *to complete the sufferings of Christ.*

Therefore, the Lord has built into His Church His own suffering, that we might observe it, that we might participate in it, *in many and various ways*, that we might *complete it*, that we might *count even our suffering as joy*. As our God has.

'And in it he built a tower, and leased it unto tenants.'

For His priests and scribes would watch over it, that the tenants might not go astray.

'And He went into another country.'

For He trusted us, for as He asks we have faith in Him, so He willed to have faith in His people, to trust us, even as He seemed far off; that we might keep His Law and do His will, rejoicing in His fruit, until the day of His return.

'Yet when the season for fruit drew near, He sent His servants to them to get His fruit. And the tenants took His servants, and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.'

'For a prophet it not without honor, save within his own country, within his own house.'

The Lord sent to us, His people, prophet upon prophet, and these we killed. Some were named within the Holy Scriptures, some after the coming of Christ, these, whom we call martyrs. We killed them all, even stoning them, that we might mock *the stone that has become the corner stone*. Murderers we became, for we imagined for ourselves a greater inheritance than that promised to us, that which *was fair*, that which *was just*, the vision of God. This we spat upon, for being unable to imagine the infinite beauty of the Lord, we set our vicious minds upon those things of the world which we consider beautiful.

How merciful, then, is our Lord, that He sent His only begotten Son, even after shedding the blood of many prophets, that we might receive our just reward, for our just stewardship?

'So finally He sent His Son to them, saying, "They will respect my Son."'

Our God is a God of madness, for after seeing how all His servants have been abused and massacred, yet He sends His Son, His only son, whom He has loved, Our Lord the Christ, stating with true faith that we will *respect Him*.

But We know how this story ends. A cross behind me stands; the Son of the Master, for we crucified Him. In our malice we killed the *Lord of Glory*. *'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.'* And we said in our hearts *'Come, let us kill him.'* For the unholy cannot bear the holy.

What, then, shall come of us? The most wicked of all beings? *'He will put those wretches to a miserable death.'*

'I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured.'

'I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.'

'I will make it a waste.'

'For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is His Church; and He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed.'

Justice He did look for, but the shedding of blood does He see. Blood shed by the only begotten son, *for the forgiveness of sins*.

How does the Lord look upon our great iniquity, and not drown us in the flood? How does He not cast us *into the outer darkness*? How does He not cast a great host upon us to throw us into slavery? Why does He not just throw us into the abyss, *where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

I tell you of one in the vineyard, one, *whom you crucified*, whose blood as grapes was pressed out of Him into the earth. And the Lord, the Lord of Love, has heard His voice, the call of His blood *crying from the ground, a better word than Abel*.

Why should He heed this word? The word of His Son, crying forth on our behalf, *'forgive them, for they know not what they do?'* Our Lord is Love, and Love is madness, for it returns injury with blessing, and sin with mercy. *'How many times shall I forgive my neighbor?'* *'Seven upon Seventy.'* That is, forever, and ever, unto the ages of ages shall you forgive, even if it be madness, for such is the madness of a lover for the one whom he has loved.

In madness Our Lord loves us, but not out of stupidity. In His image did He create us, beautiful, and beyond all other creatures. In grace did He bestow upon us every glory, even to rule over all creation, even to see Him as *he walked in the cool of the evening*, even to see Him *face to face*.

He has seen this, His own image, this humanity, fall age after age, whoring after idols, seeking after falsehoods, worshipping vain wishes, and despising our own creator. But mad He is, the Lord. And even as we have murdered His prophets, and killed His Son, yet He hears the beseeching of Christ, calling upon Him from the bread and the chalice, from everlasting unto everlasting.

Our Lord does not hate us in righteousness as we deserve. He pities us. For pitiable we are. He has mercy upon us, for miserable we are. [*For we are as sheep without a shepherd.*] We come forth this day, and drink of the wine of His vineyard, the blood of His Son, whom We crucified.

We come forth and rightly say '*Lord, I am not worthy that I should come unto your house.*'

But our God replies:

'Let me sing for my beloved, my love song concerning my vineyard.'

To Christ alone be all glory, honor and dominion, unto the end of the age.

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-36.