

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Isaiah 5:1-7

Philippians 3:4b-14

Matthew 21:33-46

There are some movies that glorify ill behavior. How many of y'all regularly root for the bad guys? Ocean's Eleven has a cast of debonair men who rip off a casino. They're thieves. The premise of the movie, it's *raison d'être*, the reason that there is an Ocean's Eleven, is to get you to root for the thieves. Bonnie and Clyde were desperados, killers, and they are sympathetically presented in a movie starring the charismatic Warren Beatty and the radiant Faye Dunaway. Perhaps it's a celluloid Rorschach Test, a tool meant to evaluate our emotional functioning, our thought patterns, and personality traits. Does God get ripped off? Do you believe that there are some who silently root for God to get ripped off? Do you care if God gets ripped off?

It's His vineyard. It's God's vineyard. He established it. And God is *meticulous*. This is a wondrous vineyard, superlative in every way. The master of the house planted it with the choicest of vines, put a defensive fence around it, He built a tower to guard the harvest, and dug a winepress to produce that which makes glad the heart of men. Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard. It's a severe parable, rife with judgment. There's nothing warm and fuzzy about it. The parable pivots on the tenants. These are wicked tenants, murderous villains. The master of the house leased the vineyard to the tenants. The owner of the vineyard, as is his right, sends servants to collect the fruit. That's when the tenants go off. They have absolutely no intention of giving the master of the house *any* of the fruit. So, they beat the master's servants, kill them, stone them again and again. It's shocking. And it's true.

The veracity of the parable is beyond doubt. It's all been effectuated. The Rotten Religious Rulers at the time of Christ are the murderous tenants. Their ilk had profaned God's servants, the prophets. They failed to present the fruit that God was looking for in His vineyard. And what do you suppose that fruit is? Faithfulness, humility, justice, mercy, goodness, charity, devotion, modesty, honesty – stewarding Christ's church properly will produce this fruit. Preaching Christ and Him crucified will produce this fruit. Holding to the inspiration of Scripture, maintaining the authority of God's Word, lifting the power of the Gospel will produce the fruit that God desires, the fruit that God Himself creates through His Word. Abandoning God's authority, abandoning the grace of God is like the wicked tenants who thought that they owned the place and could set up some sort of self-run opposition to God's reign.

This episode is filled with tension. Jesus knows what the religious leaders of Israel have done. Jesus knows what the leaders of Israel will do. *And* Jesus knows what the consequence of what the leaders will do will be. It's bloody. The tension give rise to death and death is power unleashed. By death and resurrection, a kingdom is established. By this brilliant parable, Jesus pins the Rotten Religious Rulers to the wall. Can you see how evil is vanquished by its own actions? Can you see how all-encompassing God's plan of salvation is? Jesus tells the leaders of Israel that they will crucify Him. The master of the house in the parable sends his son and says: "They will respect my son" (Matthew 21:37). But what did those wicked tenants do? They threw the son out of the vineyard and killed him (Matthew 21:39).

Have y'all seen opposition to Christ and His church? Where is *that* headed? In this grim parable, the son of the master of the house is dead, certain punishment for the tenants looms, and new tenant farmers will be chosen to care for the vineyard. But what do you know about the Son? What do you know about the crucified Son of God? This is what you know: He totally paid the price for humanity's sin – man's faithless rebellion, woman's death-loving revolt. We have failed to give our Creator the fruit that He looks for. Where He looks for charity, we offer selfishness. Where He prompts us to bring forth the fruit of love, we present narcissism. He looks for humility and we produce the wild grapes of pride. The Master of the House has every right to bring judgment down on our heads. It's His right. He is just. But God spent His rage against my sin on an innocent Substitute. Your sin – lust and deceit and your arrogant disregard for your neighbor – it must be punished! God is just. And God sent His Son. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Galatians 4:4). The Incarnate Son of God bore our sin and was nailed to a cross. Jesus is the Innocent Substitute. Blood is the payment. Blood redeemed you; Christ's sacrifice redeemed you; Jesus atoned for your sin and you are forgiven!

What did God do with His dead Son? He raised Him! Resurrection! The crucified and risen Savior is the cornerstone, the rock upon which the church is built. The wicked leaders of Israel crucified the Lord of Glory and by that action the cornerstone for the kingdom of God was laid. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes! Who is going to be able to oppose our Savior? What opposition will be able to stand against the reign of God?

You have a job. You are a steward. You are a tenant. You are both a steward and a tenant of Christ's vineyard. You have a job. This congregation is where God has placed you. You have a job. This is Christ's vineyard, as much as any other place, and we have been leased the property of the Master of the House. The fruit of love and fidelity are to be abundant in this place. Love for God is manifest in obedience to His Word, devotion to His Word. Fidelity is manifested in not allowing worldly philosophy to gain a foothold here (Colossians 2:8). Individually and corporately, we have a job. We will not turn from God's Word to the right or to the left (Joshua 1:7). We have a job. We will make disciples of anyone and everyone, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey *everything* that the Lord has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). We have a job. We are tenants. We are stewards. We have a job. We have a calling. The fruit of love and fidelity is a joy for us to bear. We give the fruit that belongs to the Lord to Him with a happy heart.

It is not an overstatement to say that there are barbarians at the gate. There are those in our culture and in the visible church who are promoting wild grapes. The media promotes those who are unchaste, greedy, and wildly self-centered. The media wants you to cheer for those who are promoting a false kingdom, a way of life that is contrary to reign of Christ the King. The media exalts those who are ripping off God, and we will *not* cheer. False theology, inside the church, is a betrayal. Works righteousness, higher criticism, secular values, postmodernism, feminism, hedonism, nihilism – these are all anathema to the vineyard. This is not a small job, being a steward of the vineyard. This is not an insignificant calling. The veracity of the parable is not in question. What is in question is how it applies to us. Jesus was calling those men to repentance and they refused. That must not be us. The vineyard of our beloved congregation has been watered by the blood of Christ. The fruit of His life is here, abundantly. Surely, you see it. We

will live a life that renders to God the fruit that is His. His love brings a harvest of fruit. His death and resurrection are in this vineyard and the fruit is all His. To God alone be the glory.