

Advent Devotional December 4, 2018

Scripture

Luke 20:9-18

⁹He began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. ¹⁰When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. ¹²And he sent still a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. ¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ ¹⁴But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, ‘This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.’ ¹⁵So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Heaven forbid!” ¹⁷But he looked at them and said, “What then does this text mean: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? ¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Randy Bush, Senior Pastor, East Liberty Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa. / Metro-Urban Institute Advisory Council

When confronted by one of Jesus’ parables, a common tendency is to jump to explaining the metaphors contained in the text. But what happens if you let the unsettling reality described in the parable simply unfold as described? The parable of the vineyard appears in all three Synoptic gospels, usually after the cleansing of the temple scene. But before leaping to a deeper message about the Passion of Christ, take a moment to consider this parable as a lesson in faith and morality.

It opens with a description of a contract between an owner and tenants—a contract that is unjustly broken when the rightful compensation is refused to be paid. When a second attempt is made, this servant is insulted, thus breaking not only the business arrangement but also a fundamental trust between the workers and the owner. When a third servant is sent, this person is literally wounded and thrown out—a clear affront against common standards of human decency. Finally, when the owner’s son is sent, the ungrateful vineyard leaseholders literally plot to kill and then act on their violent plans. Far beyond seeing a broken contract, broken trust, and broken social values, now we are told about broken humanity itself through the willingness to kill an innocent man for no just cause.

Bad thoughts and actions can escalate into terrible deeds of violence and pain. The slippery slope of unjust behavior is sadly a pathway human beings choose out of fear, out of pride, and out of sin. If we truly seek to live into God’s righteousness and Christ’s justice, we honor our contracts; we don’t betray trusts; we respect common standards of human decency; we work to repair the world, not add to its brokenness and pain. Christ’s “cornerstone” perspective truly is something upon which a beloved community (or a righteously operated vineyard) can be established to the glory of God.

Prayer

Open our eyes, living God, to the ways we distance ourselves from you and denigrate your understanding of covenant, trust, and righteousness. Shine with your Advent light into our places of darkness so that owners and workers alike may dwell in mutual peace and lasting justice. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.