

Advent Devotional December 5, 2019

Scripture

Matthew 21:33-46

33 "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 watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34 When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35 But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' 39 So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 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." 42 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'? 43 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. 44 The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. 46 They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Devotional

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What a difficult reading for the first week of Advent! But stay with this text for a while and some interesting similarities come into focus. Today we, the present caretakers of God's vineyard, are planning for the annual arrival of the Owner's most holy Son. While not planning to do him harm, we busy ourselves with baking and shopping and decorating and, yes, even attending extra worship services. In our busyness, do we neglect to provide the proper welcome?

This seemingly terrible parable provides an opportunity to pause during Advent and consider the best ways in which to prepare for the arrival of the Owner's Son. Perhaps a large dose of repentance should be added to the "to do" list this year.

I wonder . . . do our preparations really provide the best welcome possible? I wonder . . . how prepared are we to be stewards of God's bounty? I wonder . . . how many times do we subvert God's plan for the vineyard?

Note well: As we consider this parable, let us not allow the Jewish – Christian conflict of Matthew's long-ago community shape our understanding of this text. Jesus never condemns the whole Jewish people. Jesus himself was a Jew, albeit one who had some differences with the religious leadership of his day.

Prayer

Good and Gracious God, keep us mindful of our responsibilities as caretakers of your earthly vineyard. Guide our preparations during this Advent season that we may truly be prepared to welcome your Son and greet our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.