**Luke 20:9-20**

And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. **10** When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. **11**  And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. **12**  And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. **13** Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ **14** But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ **15** And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? **16**  He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” **17** But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “ ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? **18**  Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” **19**  The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. **20**  So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

**“Christ The Better Foundation”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. No doubt, Lent is about repentance or the need for change. Of course, when we think about change today it is mostly in terms of what we do. If I went the left, I need to go right. If I spent too much, I need to spend less. If I waste my time, I need to make better use of it. All this is fine, but that is not repentance in terms of Lent. Where Jesus takes us is beyond our standards of change, but to something completely new. This is what He has worked perfectly for all by the cross. Lent is a repentance that turns to the newness that comes from Christ. Life and works apart from faith in God’s Son finally ends in total failure.

Today our Gospel reading takes us to Holy Week at the temple in Jerusalem. The enemies of Christ had just questioned His authority, which in many ways was nothing new. Hostility was building, but rather than answer their question head on like in the past. Jesus turns to the people and tells them a parable that puts His suffering and death in their face. The governance and preservation of Israel was never in terms of how well they could save themselves. King David in our introit this morning reminds us, “Salvation belongs to the Lord…” (Psalms 3:8). God has made a new way by the sacrifice of His Son that is sufficient for all. We dare not make our claims unless we miss how God has claimed us in Christ by His amazing grace.

The tenants or renters in our parable bore fruit based upon their own claims. Much wickedness came from those that enjoyed how things already were. An owner gave them everything needed by his vineyard. They had both comfort and security. Yet, when the owner at last looked for some fruit there was only opposition. He found tenants making claims on their own terms. The message sent back to him was hard to miss in how they abused his servants. At last, their greed went so far as to kill his son in order somehow also to claim his inheritance.

Certainly, no body missed the crushing blow of the owner removing the tenants and giving the vineyard to others. St. Luke tells us how the people responded to Jesus, “When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” Yet, the history of Israel from the Old Testament showed the truth. As much as God had redeemed His people, they always fell back to making their own claims against Him and His Word. Instead of treasuring what the Lord gave, they wanted to control it. The leaders took personal offense at this parable, but it was judgment that applied to all of Israel.

We are those tenants who ungratefully and foolishly act out in violence. God gives abundant blessings and we twist them for selfish ends that bring our destruction. Instead of mouths to speak the truth in love, we choose to demean others, tell lies, and even curse their name. Instead of eyes of mercy, we look out for our own best interests. Instead of hands to care, we use them to cater to what we can get. God comes asking for good and there is only evil. Tenants turned to anger and possessiveness unwilling to budge for a bare minimum of fruit.

Yet, the amazing fact is not the evil in this parable, but seeing the owner’s good. God has no desire to cash in for Himself. His compassion is unbefitting to run a business in this world. The first time the tenants sent back a half-beaten and empty-handed servant should have been the last. Yet, here comes a second servant ending up the same way. The third one sent was almost a ridiculous gesture. That person would have known what was going to happen to him! Can the owner not read between the lines? Sending his beloved son was beyond a last straw, but a complete sacrifice. Such love became a spectacle at the hands evil tenants who no longer had a place in the vineyard.

God was replacing the system of Israel and its temple, leaders, and repentance with a greater goodness. All the servants God sent came to fullness in the Suffering servant of His beloved Son. What the people feared only turned to crying out against Jesus days later saying, “Crucifying Him!” What the leaders sought to protect turned to the ways of man to cast God’s Son on the cross outside Jerusalem. The evil action of sinners actually did not change, but God planned on it. His love was working out something new for Israel and all people. As scripture promised, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?”

The amazing grace of God has never given up on anyone! Do you see how dedicated God is to you? He does not play by the rules or look out for Himself. Instead of stripping us of His blessings and giving us the boot, it all falls on Christ. This beloved Son of the Father proves God more than waits on us. He has won all things for us by His great compassion. Jesus lays down this claim promising God looks over no one. Whatever the world has rejected of you, however foolish you may be, or regardless the regretful life, the crucified Jesus is how God finds His way to you. What man by his foolishness cast out, God made right for any in His Son. He died for sinners not for the righteous. God’s way of forgiveness cares little for counting, but wants to be constant and unmoving for your good.

Christ brings us back into the vineyard with fruitfulness to honor Him. The stone that must break us to pieces and crush us by His cross also gives life by His Name. Fruit was never going to come from evil tenants, because they had no love for the owner. Christ is God’s offering of love that lets all turn to Him for forgiveness, life, and salvation. This cornerstone has made us into a new creation by the promise of His Word. Instead of leasing the vineyard, God gives it to us in full to eat and drink of His kingdom. Tenants for a time now can look to baptism as children of God to have an eternal inheritance. Christ has made a way far better than our life and work. St. Paul tells us, “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Since God does not waiver in His love, fruit in the vineyard abounds. Like the owner, the Lord has no harsh quota. He seeks fruit that abides by faith in Him. Our Lutheran Fathers put it this way, “We have testified often that penitence ought to produce good fruit. What these fruits are, we learn from the commandments…not to buy off eternal punishment but to keep from surrendering to the devil or offending the Holy Spirit” (Tappert 210:174). Rather than a system of pride like Israel, Christ is now the better foundation. His Church experiences life through Him by Word and Sacrament. This is love at work in us able to deny self for others, exchanges glory for the cross, and knows salvation “belongs” to the Lord. Repentance in Lent turns us to newness outside of our hands. We dare not make our claims unless we miss how God has claimed us in Christ by His amazing grace. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.