**Matt 21:33-46 (ESV)**

**33**  “Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. **34** When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. **35**  And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. **36**  Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. **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 have his inheritance.’ **39** And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. **40**  When therefore 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 let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” **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 marvelous in our eyes’? **43** Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. **44** And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” **45** When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. **46** And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

**“Living On The Edge”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The theme for the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League this year is “Being with Jesus: living on the edge.” This kind of boldness in the Gospel is purely a gift from God. It is not the same as trying to build up courage to go sky diving. It is different from deciding on financial investments for the future. It is nothing like facing the possible dangers out in the fields during a dry harvest. Any rescue worker, solider, and others can speak about living on the edge in this sinful world. However, the LWML as a missionary society serves with boldness to share the good news from God. It takes people to the edge of something far outside the works and strength of men. Courage to live on the edge with Jesus comes only by faith in Him saving sinners.

When Jesus told the parable of the tenants, He was speaking directly to the Sanhedrin. These were the leading figures of the Jewish people. It was a mixture consisting of Pharisees, Sadducees, the high priest, and elders. The equivalent today would be a voter’s assembly or board of directors. This council managed and judged the affairs of Israel. Their formation as a governing organization happened two centuries prior to the arrival of the Messiah. In many ways, they helped keep things together in the past when prophetic revelation was silent. Yet, when time came for the promised Savior, Jesus gave a strict warning. As much good as they did in honoring the Law, it would be their undoing. They would not surrender their works to the better way of God’s promising Word made flesh. Their self-righteousness not only stood as a barrier to true faith. It also showed how fearful they were for they would finally kill Jesus.

Can something starting out to be good like a business, organization, or cause end up being bad? Can a person do what is right only to find out it was for the wrong reasons? The courage of humanity comes from works, but God’s Word calls us to repent before Jesus. It challenges the hands of men in this world whether among church, state, or family. Living on the edge with Jesus is God graciously greeting us on His terms. Martin Luther writes,

“Although external vices, adultery, fornication, theft, are also hindrances in the way of the Lord which must be removed, yet presumption and self-righteousness are far greater and graver; for they absolutely preclude (prohibit) the approach to grace” (Plass 1274:4067).

The parable of the tenants shows how the renters wanted to be the owners. Works consume our life by the Law. The Father knows we naturally trust them. Yet, what at first is a comfort only makes us more fearful for control. It forces God’s grace out of the picture. Baptism into Jesus’ death proclaims all put God’s Son on the cross. All want to be the owner! Preaching repentance breaks the spell of self-righteousness created by our hands. God’s Word gives courage to stand before Jesus who alone is Savior of sinners.

After hearing the parable, the Sanhedrin judged rightly what should happen to the renters of the vineyard. Jesus used their answer as a sign of judgment against them. To despise the promised Savior was to reject how the Father graciously built Israel upon the mercy of His Son. Jesus said, “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 marvelous in our eyes’?” Like in the parable, the Jewish leaders had no respect for the Son sent by the Father. The word “respect” also means, “turn to” or “reverence” for Him. It was hard enough to hear the prophets, but worse than words. The Son of God was an eyesore of sacrifice and love as the Savior. In denying Jesus, the Sanhedrin had to deny the Word. Of course, by removing God’s Son and casting him out on a cross. The leadership of Israel kept the structure only to lose God’s source of grace given in His Son.

The true Israel, the Church, has always had her foundation on Christ. It is courage built on Jesus. Yet, we easily forget this need for the Savior. He is what the “builders” rejected. This building happens in every age. People fixated on works find little room for Jesus to work forgiveness for sinners. As much as we look upon the Church in whatever time, what has always kept her safe is Jesus. He forgives our shortfalls. He saves us from our sins. He makes and breaks the Church. As Herman Sasse says,

“One does not decide to join the church; he is rather called to the church. We do not build the church ‘Arise! Let us build Zion!’; we are only the stones used to build it, or at most the tools used to build it. The church of the Word is the church of the sola gractia [‘by grace alone’] (The Lonely Way, Vole I. 130).

Courage built on Jesus lets us live on the edge. He is in control by His sacrifice made on the cross. Rather than a market driven church, God goes beneath the structures of men. His Word and Sacraments make church, church, for there is Christ redeeming us to have faith in Him. St. Paul, one of the hardest working and busiest apostle still declared, “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Since sitting on the Sanhedrin came by election, it only makes sense that the people suffered. They share the same fate as their leaders. Jesus pointed out how the kingdom of God would go to others who produced its fruit among the Gentiles. This was the fruits of repentance, faith, and a new life flowing out from being with Jesus. As comfortable and controlled the Sanhedrin kept everything. The shocking fact remained, “And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” What was a curse of judgment for some became a promise of victory for others. Jesus broken and beaten on the cross rose from the dead. Where the evil ways of man won for a time, God has the last Word for eternity. Living on the edge was not as scary as it seemed. Jesus took care of silencing the enemies of His Church by the glory hidden in the cross.

During the Reformation era, when worries far exceeded what we worry about today in gas prices, healthcare, church size, or whatever. The Lutheran Fathers did not take refuge in their works for that was the very thing they were fighting against! They wrote, “For our works are worthless, and with the whole church we teach that we are saved by mercy” (Tappert 159:338). Surely, they worked but that was a poor structure compared to the salvation laid upon Christ. Only He delivers us from the real enemies of sin, death, and the Devil. What the LWML gives this morning to the children in bibles and catechism is courage. Courage that alone comes from Christ. Where people fear living on the edge. Jesus goes to extremes to love selfish people. His victory proclaimed even now at the Supper pours into our lives to give faith in Him. It is true courage kept safe by the cross. God comes for His vineyard and there is reason enough to trust in Him. It was always a gift given in Jesus for sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.