

Sunday, October 2-8 (A)– Matthew 21:33-46

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Courage*

Focus Question: *When in your life have you needed courage?*

word of life

“The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.” Matthew 21:43 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 21:33-46

This is the third parable in Matthew 20-21 in which Jesus uses the imagery of the vineyard. This parable closely parallels the Song of the Vineyard found in Isaiah 5:1-7. It would be helpful to read this Old Testament song to note the similarities. The religious leaders to whom Jesus tells the parable would no doubt have been familiar with the passage from Isaiah.

The characters in the Isaiah’s story are clearly identified. God is the owner of the vineyard who lovingly and carefully digs up the soil, clears it of stones, and plants the best vines. A watchtower is made to protect the vineyard, and a wine vat is constructed for the harvest. The vineyard is Israel; Judah is the planting. But despite the owner’s loving care, only wild grapes are found.

1. *Can you relate to the vineyard owner?*
2. *Have you ever worked on a project with disappointing results? How does it feel?*

Likewise, in the parable of the wicked tenants, the same kind of loving care is depicted in the landowner’s actions. The vineyard is entrusted to tenants who refuse the owner the harvest, abuse the owner’s servants, and kill the owner’s son.

3. *What are some possible reasons why the tenants didn’t treat the heir better?*

This leads to the pronouncement of judgment and rejection. The original tenants who confuse ownership with stewardship are replaced by another people (Greek word *ethno*) who will yield fruits of the kingdom (vs. 43) at the harvest time.

4. *How did the chief priests and the Pharisees respond to this parable?*
(See verses 45- 46)
5. *How is this parable a picture of or allegory of the history of salvation?*

There are several points to note. Both the heir and Jesus are killed outside the walls. Also, note the Greek word for “time” is not *chronos* (chronological time, e.g., “What time is it?”) but *kairos* (the fullness of time, e.g., an expectant mother saying to the soon-to-be-a-father, “It’s time!”)

This parable has been interpreted to give the early church its legitimacy as the “new tenants” of the vineyard. But its message and its challenge speak to the church of every age. God lovingly, graciously calls us into the vineyard. God plants and equips the vineyard – the church – and then entrusts it to our stewardship. God’s intention is a full, rich harvest of the fruits. The harvest time will come. The question – and the challenge – for us is: “Will we have the courage to be faithful stewards, bearing fruit?”

6. *What role does courage have when it comes to bearing fruit?*
7. *What are examples of the “fruits” of the kingdom? (Look at Paul’s list of the “fruits of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-26.) How are those fruits reflected in your congregation?*

word *among us*

A church was once established – a beautiful, warm church with wonderful facilities to praise its Founder and serve its neighbors. It was blessed with energetic, gifted members who enjoyed one another’s fellowship.

But the Founder went away, and the purpose for its founding was forgotten. The members didn’t always remember the source of their gifts and the calling to be good stewards of the many blessings they had been given. In their forgetfulness, in small acts of faithlessness and neglect, the mission and calling of the Founder was lost.

So, what do you think the Founder will do?

The Founder will see that the mission and calling is fulfilled. The Founder will raise up faithful members who will bear good fruit. And to all the members – the faithful and the faithless – the Founder will send the gift of the Heir, the Son.

Each time the members gather together, they will remember and recall the gift. They will remember how, even in the midst of betrayal and faithlessness, the Heir took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, “This is my body, given for you.” The cup will be raised, and they will hear once again the words of the Heir, “This cup is the new covenant between the Founder and the church, given for you – even for you, the faithless tenants - for the forgiveness of sin.”

Each time they eat of the bread and drink from the cup, they proclaim the Good News of the Founder’s gift of the Heir until he comes again. And until the Heir comes, The Founder will continue to care for the members, feed them, and send the Holy Spirit to call and find the members when they get lost.

We who have been blessed with the gift of the Founder’s love are empowered with the gift of the Heir’s life and guided by the gift of the Spirit’s calling.

1. *What do you find challenging in this modern-day parable?*
2. *What is comforting? What is disturbing?*
3. *Think of some examples of when “ownership” and “stewardship” are confused.*
4. *How does either of the parables challenge the modern-day disciple of Jesus?*
5. *In what way does a follower of Jesus today needs to have courage?*

Prayer

O Christ, help us to be faithful and to bear good fruit!

Dig Deeper

Galatians 5:22-27



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2005 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship

last word

This week, pray for courage to intentionally and boldly bear fruit.