

**Twenty-first Sunday After Pentecost**  
**Matthew 21:33-46**  
**Preacher: Vicar, Jim Goodyear**

**St. Peter's Lafayette Hill, PA**  
**October 5, 2008**

### **What Have I Done?**

Expectations, we all have them. We expect to be rewarded for our efforts. We expect to reach an intended goal after a time of planning and work. We expect to receive. We expect others to listen to what we have to say. We expect those in authority to make decisions with our needs in mind. We expect to receive respect from others. Like you, I have my own expectations. I expect one day to become an ordained pastor in the Lutheran church. I expect my sons to do well in their work. I expect to share my personal life with another person someday. I expect, and the list goes on. And then along comes something that disrupts our intended plan of reaching our expectations. Roadblocks, if you will, on the journey to what we expect to receive. A crisis of some sort; the loss of income because of a poor investment or drop in stock prices; our failure to realize that what we have is all we need. Something seems to get in the way of reaching our intended expectation.

The landowner in today's text from Matthew expected to receive the produce from his land at harvest time. He prepared the land for its first crop of grapes. He built a wine press, erected a watch tower, he had everything in place to ensure his grapes would grow. He hired tenants to care for the crops. He expected the tenants to properly care for the grapes; harvest them when they were ripe; even to make them into juice that would later become wine. When the grapes were ripe, the landowner expected to receive the product. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to receive the product. Not that he expected a bountiful harvest for the first year is usually small, he did expect to receive some grapes. When he sent his servants to pick up the grapes, the tenants killed the servants. A second time, the landowner sent his servants to retrieve the harvest and they too were killed. The landowner had to show diligence in collecting his rent because if he didn't, the tenants could gain title to the land. The landowner thought surely they won't kill my son. So he sent his son, but the tenants saw an opportunity to not only gain title to the land but to inherit it. The tenants took the son out of the vineyard and killed him. A smart move on the tenants part, for if they had killed the son in the vineyard the land would become unclean. Now the question becomes what will the landowner will do when he comes to face the tenants. Will he kill them or forgive them? Will he evict them from his property and find other tenants? Jesus says in this parable, 'do you not know the scriptures say those the builders rejected will become the cornerstone?'

This parable is an example of an allegory, a story in which each element has a hidden or symbolic meaning; the landowner is God; the vineyard is the nation of Israel; the tenants are the people of Israel or the today's church; the slaves are the prophets; the son is Jesus. God established a covenant with Abraham and the people of Israel. He placed them in the vineyard and told them they would be His people. He would provide for their every need. They would become a great nation. God promised to provide for them. To ensure that God's promise would be heard, he sent prophets; those chosen by God to proclaim the goodness of the Lord; a voice for the people of Israel to hear. What did they do? Like the tenants, they killed the prophets. If not physically, they questioned the meaning of their prophecies and did what they wanted. The

messages from God often went unheard. God then sent His Son, Jesus, his heir, the one who would one day inherit the vineyard. He too was killed. The leaders of the synagogue and civil authorities thought Jesus to be a problem, a prophet, so they took him outside the city walls and killed him. The rejected stone (People of Israel/Jesus) of the builder (God) becomes the cornerstone. Who is the new tenant of the vineyard? Who will give the landowner the produce of the harvest time? Today's Christian Church.

Today's church is the new tenant in the vineyard. We are the new heirs of God's new covenant in Jesus Christ. We have been called to share the Good News of God's love with others. Jesus charges us to 'go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded' (Matthew 28:19-20). God expects us to go out into the world and share the Good News. To proclaim to others the saving power of Jesus Christ in the world. The kingdom of God is not just for us to enjoy ourselves; to receive this living faith and hold onto it. It is not in the receiving, but in the giving of ourselves in the name of Jesus that we are called to go into world and do likewise. It is not for us to expect God to come to us. He has already done that with His own Son. We have received the gift. It is now ours to share graciously with anyone willing to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. What have you and I done? Are we able to accept this call and go out or will God find a new tenant for the vineyard?

Today is World Wide Communion; a Sunday set aside when the Christian church around the world shares its commonality, in the body of Christ. There is no better way to share this love of God in Jesus than to celebrate in communion with each other. Others we have no idea who they are, but to know they love the Lord just as we do. God's love extends beyond our own borders of Whitemarsh Township or Philadelphia or the United States. It includes countries that probably many of us couldn't find on the map. We gather in Christ's name to celebrate the unity of our faith in the sacrament of Holy communion. God's love extends much further than we could ever imagine. To distant lands that live in different cultures, that speak different languages. No matter the differences, we share the same love of God. Statistics show the Christian Church is growing rapidly in areas like South America, Africa, Korea, and China while here in the United States Christianity continues to decline. Is God lifting a new tenant in the vineyard? In some Christian circles, the United States is thought to be the new mission field of the Christian Church.

Last January I visited China with a group from the Seminary. In China, a communist country, Christianity is the fastest growing religion. They also call themselves 'Christians'. They are not defined by a denominational standard; rather all are one in the body of Christ. During our time there we worshiped with two different congregations. Both had over 800 worshipers with multiple worship services on a Sunday morning. I visited a contemporary church late on a Sunday afternoon between worship service number four and five. This church had over 1200 attendees at each service. When I would talk with the people there it was like they were discovering Jesus Christ for the first time. The excitement in their eyes, in their handshakes, in their hospitality – all sent a message of Good News in knowing Jesus Christ.

When was the last time you shared your joy of Jesus in your life with someone else? As Christians, I think we have become complacent for our own good. We take church for granted.

We live in a live-and-let-live world where its ok if you come to church and ok if you don't. It's ok if you follow Jesus and if you don't, God still loves you anyway. Too often we believe church growth happens in transfers of membership. The question we need to ask is 'are they alive?' Do you know the love of God in Jesus Christ? Can you share your love of Jesus with someone else? I think too often we are intimidated by Christians who wear their faith on their sleeve. The ones who quickly identify the day they were saved. Or the ones who ask have you been saved. The answer is 'yes', I was saved the day Jesus died for me on the cross. For a long time, I thought in order for someone else to know about Jesus you had to offer the 'God talk'. That it is necessary to speak of God or Jesus in those terms. I expected they wanted to hear specific references. The reality is, the 'God talk' comes in our words and actions. To know God in your life is to share yourself with another person; in a conversation, in working together, in helping others less fortunate than yourself, in being there when someone needs a helping hand, a simple gift, a thoughtful card. Sharing your faith is really that simple. We put greater expectations on ourselves to share faith, and the reality is, it is that simple. That is how you share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ with others.

As we celebrate our connection with Christians around the world today, celebrating our unity in Christ what is your record of faithfulness? Are you expecting someone else to do the work we are all called to do or are you ready to work in the vineyard? Living in faith is not a matter of pride in the way we hear of other Christians expressing their faith. It is a matter of life and death – of living in the kingdom of God or dying to the sins of the world. We have a responsibility to be good stewards of this vineyard we call the kingdom of God, and good stewards we must be. What have you done to grow the kingdom of God? Amen.