

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

Matthew 21:33–46 [Jesus said:] “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. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 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.” 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’? **Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.** And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

In the Name of Jesus.

‘GIVEN to a people producing its fruits...!’

The Son born of Mary so saves His people from their sins, that this PEOPLE to whom He GIVES the Kingdom of God can even be you and me! So says the Baptism GIVEN to you and me, the Happy News of the all men's sins forgiven GIVEN to you and me, and His Body and His Blood GIVEN to you and to you, too.

My work's done for the day! That was an easy one!

But since The Holy Spirit has gone called and gathered us today, the Introit today calls on us to 'give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!'

THAT is the fruit He's looking for, my dear ones: the sacrifice of thanksgiving! The fruit for which the LORD sent prophets and kings and priests and seers and regular ordinary saints and sinners to receive from Israel of Old, the Old Kingdom. And what did they find instead? The bane of all religion, of Christendom too!

There's a PUN at the end of the Isaiah lesson that I hope I can bring across. 'He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!' Please bear with me; I mean this for your good.

The Hebrew of Isaiah has a pun.

He looked for JUSTICE—MISH-PAT—

But behold: BLOOSHED—MISH-PACH!

He looked for RIGHTEOUSNESS—TSEDEQAH—

But behold: an OUTCRY—TSA-‘ACAH!

It’s only ONE LETTE OFF in each word—as if Our Spirit and Isaiah were pointing to the slippery, hypocritical phoniness of religious pretence that ALWAYS attacks the Word of God. ‘Did God really say....?’

Or, as my dear brother, Rev. Drew, likes to remind me: it’s not what the devil and his mouthpieces get WRONG that’s so bad; it’s how much they get RIGHT—up to a point; and then the twisting and turning of the Word of the LORD.

God looked for justice but got bloodshed—quite different.

God looked for righteousness, but got an outcry—again, worlds apart!

Justice? Bloodshed! MISH-PAT? No, MISH-PACH!

God’s will lived out—righteousness? An outcry! TSEDE-QAH? No! TSE-‘AQAH!

Look! The GOSPEL is way more hard to understand than a foreign language; even Hebrew! That's why I like learning Hebrew and such! It comforts me that I might learn SOMETHING that God approves us! The GOSPEL is utterly beyond me!

As it was beyond the Lord's opponents there in Jerusalem. They'd've arrested Him if they could've. But what goes along with preening and prancing about is the tyranny of always keeping an eye on the next man, on the crowd, on public opinion, on the way the wind is blowing. First step phony—it's phony all the way!

No worry! By the end of the week, they'd get a crowd on their side and howl not just for His arrest, but for His butchering.

'They will respect My Son.' And we're inching toward the Gospel! Yes, THEY will respect the Son, David's heir, the One to Whom ALL authority in heaven and earth is now GIVEN—as the kingdom is GIVEN to those producing the fruits of the Kingdom of God. But just who are THEY?

The Gospel is teeming with descriptions of those who can only say and LIVE OUT 'Oh, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! I'm the LAST one who deserved such a thing: GOD HIMSELF!'

'He shall save His people from their sins.'

‘When Jesus came to be baptized, John would have prevented Him. But He fulfilled all righteousness.’

‘The healthy do not need a doctor; the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

THOSE are THEY who PRODUCE the FRUIT of the KINGDOM of GOD!

Which is ALSO the reason that the oldest name for what we call the Lord’s Supper is the Eucharist, the **THANKSGIVING!**

For WHO has cause to be more grateful before GOD in His Kingdom than you and I? Hang on for your call to repentance here. It ain't pretty and it ain't nice! But I just work here; I've just been sent to produce in you giving of thanks.

For almost no men in the world have heard and learned the Gospel: that God was in Christ reconciling the WORLD to Himself, NOT counting men's sins against them!

But you and I have been STEEPED in that Gospel from our Baptism!

And God looks to our little corner of the vineyard to see JUSTICE: He looks for the MOST GRATEFUL to be the MOST ALIGNED with His Will! The One Whose FULLNESS dwelt in Christ in bodily form, and still does.

So the next man is blessed to run across you and me EACH MOMENT, EACH DAY—nicht wahr? Right?!

'The Life is in the Blood!' Meaning, E-V-E-R-Y advantage taken over the next poor man—either in the simplicity of his godliness, or in the weakness of his sin—is blooshed!

Well, yes, pastor..... But God FORGIVES us when we sin, right? Sure; why not?! But He does NOT pardon us to ENCOURAGE US to hold the sword, the rock over the next man's head, making him quake in conscience either for OUR nastiness, OR for OUR judgmental-ism parading as justice.

God's looks for the production of righteousness—meaning, that men do NOT even need to BELIEVE...IN...GOD...in order to see and live with GOD! 'Cuz they got US'N!

And OUR REVELATION of GOD—which we have learned from the Gospel, my dear ones—OUR PEELING BACK THE CURTAIN OF HEAVEN—TO...ALL...MEN—

TELLS...ALL...MEN...

That God's face is shining on them!

That heaven will NOT treat us as we deserve!

That Our Father's moment of anger was extinguished on Calvary! But that, now, His loving-kindness and undeserved favor are LIFE—and last as long as CHRIST is Risen from the Dead, LIVES and REIGNS FOREVER!

Pray for your pastor, my dear ones Christians!

I can quote you the Gospel in a dozen languages—and have YET to learn to produce it. I am charged with teaching your children—and y'all—the will of God; now, the Gospel! That God is ONLY HAPPY when the WORLD rejoices in the cornerstone of His Kingdom: CHRIST, who RULES by PARDON! And how

little I have learned myself to pardon.

The one thing I have going for me, besides your prayers, is the Thanksgiving that is GIVEN to me: My Savior's Body and Blood; for one purpose; so that I receive the Gift that is God!

You cannot possibly fail God the way I do. But if there is any HINT of BLOODSHED AND OUTCRY from those who must suffer you—any hint of what those around me must suffer—rejoice and be glad!

For today—still today!—it is the Father's good pleasure to GIVE away His Kingdom, to those who have not earned it...one...tiny...bit.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for THAT'S who He is good!

His mercy endures FOREVER in the Name of Jesus! Amen!