

A Critical Time

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Fifth Sunday in Lent) is Luke 20:9-20. In this parable the owner is God, the vineyard is Israel, the tenants are the religious leaders, the servants are the prophets, and the beloved son is Jesus. The parable's background fits absentee landlord arrangements of the first century. The point is not the vineyard's productivity but the caretaker's actions. (TLSB)

The first four stanzas (20:9b-12) retell the history of God's work through the prophets for the salvation of Israel. Every time God sent a prophet to Israel, it created a "critical time," a "right season," because prophets speak for God. They declare his salvific intentions and his judgment upon those who reject him. God supports their preaching through miraculous deeds. The hearer will note that Jesus has just wept over Jerusalem "because you did not know the appointed time of your visitation." He will also remember that Jesus exhorted the crowds "to examine this critical time." Now this parable tests the ability of the people and the religious establishment to discern whether the "critical time" is upon them in the life and ministry of Jesus. Are they able to see that Jesus is speaking this parable about his own rejection in Jerusalem? Will the parable's indictment of their participation in that rejection lead them to repentance? *The critical time is now*, in this final week in Jerusalem, where Jesus is destined to die. (CC p. 762)

The meaning of the parable is clear. Jesus is talking about himself! But at this point, he breaks off the parable and interprets the significance of his own death for salvation history.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that there are times when we have not paid attention to Christ and his Word. Therefore we have missed critical times. But, Christ's death provides forgiveness of sins for our poor spiritual stewardship. Through his Word and Sacraments Jesus has made us a member of his NT Church. He is this "Church's one foundation" (LSB 644 v.1).

During Lent people sometimes give up something to help them focus on Christ's suffering. Perhaps it might be a better idea to add something like a devotional time during this season. This may even lead to a continuing devotional life throughout the year.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, forgive me when I have taken your Word lightly. Help me to more fully focus on your eternal gifts and help others who may have strayed from your life saving gifts. Amen