

Notes for Next Sunday

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isiah 5:1-7). This skillful parable was likely proclaimed at the Feast of Booths when Israel celebrated God's blessings of the harvest. It begins in the style of a joyful love song, filled with harvest imagery, but soon turns into an indictment (v 3). Parables of this type are designed to get listeners to pass judgment upon themselves. The narrator elicits his listeners' outrage at a hypothetical injustice. Their response is then applied to a real situation involving the audience. Only then do they realize that the story is about them (cf Mt 21:33-46).

Epistle (Philippians 3:4b-14). Paul's pre-Christian confidence was rooted in his Jewish pedigree, privileges and attainments. All that is rubbish now that he is a Christian. Paul is talking about living a real life of faith rooted in the death and resurrection wrought for us in Baptism. The Christian life is like a race; elsewhere Paul uses athletic imagery in a similar way. Paul's goal is Christ's goal for him, and Christ supplies the resources for him to "press on toward the goal." Looking back, while running ahead, is a dangerous procedure for the athlete in a race. For Paul the prize of victory is everlasting life.

Gospel (Matthew 21:33-46). This is the second of three parables spoken by Jesus shortly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. All three parables are spoken, in succession, after the chief priests and elders of the people had questioned Jesus' authority (21:23). By this late point in Jesus' ministry, the division between him and the leaders of the Jewish people is sharply drawn. Our Lord's imminent death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit at Pentecost ("When . . . the owner of the vineyard comes," v 40) are important for understanding Jesus' words to the Jewish leaders.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isiah 5:1-7

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.² He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.³ "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.⁴ What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?"⁵ Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.⁶ I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it."⁷ The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

5: I loved one. It was the Lord who inspired the prophet to sing this song. The prophet read the song right out of God's mind. (Stoeckhardt)

5: I vineyard. God had made Israel His people, had separated it from other peoples. God then had also purged this planning and driven out the heathen. Ps. 44:2. Israel's land and inheritance, Canaan, was a fertile headland. Because of its rocky heights and mountain strongholds it was a secure, well-protected country and a very fertile land flowing with milk and honey. (Stoeckhardt)

5:1 *fertile hillside*. Vineyards were usually located on hills and mountains where they could obtain a lot of sunshine. Every mountain peak had fertile soil. It was the nature of mountain soil to be fertile and productive. (Stoeckhardt)

5:2 *dug it up and cleared it of stones*. Tilled the ground. This may have been done by hand instead of with an animal-drawn plow because vineyards were sometimes planted on steep hills. (TLSB)

5:2 *watchtower*. The tower, Israel's defense system, is the royal citadel in Jerusalem, the government of David and the house of David. (Stoeckhardt)

5:2 *winepress*. The winepress is the temple. There flows the delicious wine of the Word of God. (Stoeckhardt)

5:2 *he looked for ... but*. It produced sour grapes. The term used is a bit stronger: "stinking grapes." (Leupold)

5:5 TAKE AWAY ITS HEDGE... BREAK DOWN ITS WALL – Vineyards were often encircled by thorn-hedges, which then were surrounded by a low stone wall. After the removal of this double defense system the vineyard will become a pasture and be trampled underfoot. The fulfillment of this prophecy began already during the days of Isaiah. Assyria, the world empire, invaded Judah. Then followed Babylon, the Greek. Finally came the Romans to take away land and people. Yes, God will complete the ruin of His people. (Stoeckhardt)

EPISTLE – Philippians 3:4b-14

⁴ If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

3:5 *tribe of Benjamin*. His Jewish roots are deep and unambiguous. Jerusalem, the Holy City, lay on the border of the tribal territory of Benjamin. (CSB)

3:5 *Hebrew of Hebrews*. There are only Hebrews in Paul's known ancestry. He was fiercely loyal to his race as a Hebrew. (TLSB)

3:5 *Pharisee*. A most earnest sect of Judaism. (TLSB)

3:6 *faultless*. In terms of legalistic standards of scrupulous external conformity to the law. (CSB)

3:8 *knowing Christ Jesus*. Not only a knowledge of facts but a knowledge gained through experience that, in its surpassing greatness, transforms the entire person. The following verses spell this out. (CSB)

3:10 sharing in his sufferings. He who believes in Christ also enters into “the fellowship of His sufferings.” He who believes must also suffer with Christ. Yet also that is gain. (Stoekhardt)

3:12 already obtained. Just before the Apostle spoke of the resurrection, including its end and aim: eternal life. That is very obviously the object of “obtain.” When one comes to faith he is immediately and completely justified, and so eternal life becomes his own. (Stoekhardt)

3:13 Forgetting. Not losing all memory of his sinful past, but leaving it behind him as done with and settled. (CSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 21:33-46

³³ **“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. ³⁸ “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹ “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ”“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’ ? ⁴³ “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.**

21:33 winepress. This is the temple with its ritualism and the sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. (Ylvisaker)

21:33 watchtower. For guarding the vineyard, especially when the grapes ripened, and for shelter. The rabbis specified that it was to be a raised wooden platform, 15 feet high and 6 feet square. (CSB)

21:34 his servant. A reference to the Old Testament prophets. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

21:35 killed...stoned The servant killed by stoning represents the OT prophets. This underlines that the rebellious tenants and their master held different religious beliefs and practices. (TLSB)

21:41 other tenants. Gentiles, to whom Paul turned when the Jews, for the most part, rejected the gospel (Ac 13:46; 18:6). By the second century the church was composed almost entirely of Gentiles.

21:44 will be broken to pieces. As a pot dashed against a stone is broken, and as one lying beneath a falling stone is crushed, so those who reject Jesus the Messiah will be doomed. (CSB)