

What Sort of Tenant Am I? 2020
2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13 Matthew 21:33-46

2 Samuel 12:1-9, 13 (New Revised Standard Version)

...and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.

Matthew 21:33-46 (New Revised Standard Version)

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 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 get his inheritance.'" So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when 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 lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." 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 amazing in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

From the roof of his palace, King David watched Bathsheba bathing,
and committed adultery with her while his army was off fighting,
then arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle ...
... and he thought he'd hidden away his dirty little secret.

The prophet Nathan came to see David and told him a story
about a very rich man with (vs. 2) very many flocks and herds.

This prosperous man, entertaining a visitor with a meal, (vs. 4)

was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.

When David heard what the man had done, he was incensed. vs. 5-6

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Then boom, his dirty little secret was out in the open, vs. 7

Nathan said to David, "You are that man!

The light of God's truth had exposed David's sin, vs. 9

Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: ... Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

"The story about taking the poor man's lamb, **it is about you** ---
for the Lord has seen, judged and condemned what you have done."

Immediately David humbles himself and repents, vs. 9

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Though David's sin does lead to severe consequences, **God is gracious,**

vs. 13 Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.

In a similar move, to when David was exposed by Nathan's story,
in Matthew, Jesus tells a story about some greedy conniving tenants.

A landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall and winepress,
then leaves that region and **leases it to some tenants.**

When he sends servants to collect the rent, his share of produce,
these selfish & greedy tenants beat & even killed some of them.

Supposing it was a mistake, the landowner sends other servants,
and they too are **attacked and driven-off empty-handed.** vs. 37-39

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 get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Jesus drew this parable from one told by the prophet Isaiah, 5:1-2

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

Isaiah is describing Israel's history of rebellion against God.

God is the vineyard owner and the vineyard represents Israel.

Israel was given the gift and blessing of the Promised Land.

They were supposed to produce a harvest of righteousness
as faithful stewards of God's generosity and blessings...

...but instead produced the wild grapes of idolatry and injustice.

The passage from Isaiah about the vineyard God built
was a call to repent and a warning to the nation of Israel
of God's coming judgment, their defeat and exile to Babylon.

*** Isaiah was writing about trouble in the Lord's vineyard.**

Earlier Jesus had driven the money-changers and animal-sellers
out from the Temple in Jerusalem during Holy Week,
and the chief priests and Pharisees were offended and angry
that Jesus had dared to cleanse **their** temple, **their** power.

Jesus was on their turf, a threat to **their** authority and income.

The chief priests and Pharisees demanded that Jesus explain

by what authority he had cleansed the Temple,
and Jesus answered them by telling this parable,
a story about trouble in the Lord's vineyard.

The religious authorities understood the plot of the parable,
but then missed the connection and point Jesus was making,

and like King David, they were very quick to condemn, vs. 40-41,

Jesus asked, Now when 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 lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

As in Isaiah, in the parable Jesus tells,
God is the vineyard owner and the vineyard represents Israel.

Like the tenants plotting against the vineyard owner's son,
the chief priests and Pharisees were offended and angry,
and will arrest, condemn and crucify the Son sent by God.

This parable serves as a mirror

in which the religious authorities could see themselves, vs. 45-46

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him ...

In sharp contrast to David's humble repentance,

even though they recognized themselves in the parable,
they still opposed, arrested and killed Jesus anyway,
for similar reasons as the tenants in the parable.

They perceived themselves and behaved as if the vineyard was theirs,
and they would not willingly give up their power and control,
even if it required killing the Son ...

**... for as it turns out, greed, selfishness and bitterness,
become a very destructive and deadly thing.**

can indeed

Years ago, when I first preached a sermon on this Matthew text
it was a fairly aggressive 'be-generous' stewardship message,
be faithful & generous with the owner's property, or else.

I pointed out that my life and all it contains, **everything**

is really **of God's vineyard** and none of it actually belongs to me,
because it was all created **by God** and entrusted to me **by God**.

But sometimes, like those greedy and self-serving tenants,
we too may stake our claim on what God has generously given to us.
Sometimes, I hold stuff too tightly, worried I might not have enough.

**My attitude toward possessions does not always honor God,
and I lose sight of the One who always provides for me.**

The vineyard represents far more than just material possessions,
but also includes all of the blessings we've received from God,
such health, talents, family and even years in which to live---
all of which are intended by God to yield **fruits of the kingdom.**

So **how are we doing with the vineyard that God entrusts to us?,
and am I living like those greedy and faithless tenants,
who falsely act and live as if the vineyard belongs to them?**

On the other hand, **where is the grace and Good News in all this?,
or is this passage all about threat, failure and consequences?**

Surely the most significant thing we need to know in this life
is that we belong to Christ and we are the beloved children of God,
called to be caretakers of God's creation, this world,
where we live as tenants in this vineyard of the Lord.

Yes, I do believe the parable is teaching about faithful stewardship,
our attitudes and generosity, and what we do as temporary tenants...
...but it's about far more than just doing good works and trying harder.

Consider the sacramental moments of your own life experience,
those amazing times when God has felt so close and so real,
when you have personally tasted that our God is good...

... and remember that something far better and more lasting,
that eternal life with Jesus in God's Kingdom awaits us,
and that is our true home **not the vineyard of this world.**

I had a friend who worked at the Jordanian Embassy in Wash. DC,
and quite often he would travel home to Jordan for a visit,
because of concern that living in America and acclimating to America,
might cause him to forget his true home and loyalties to Jordan.

As God's own people, chosen and precious,
**this world is not our ultimate home,
and our lives are not defined by what happens in this world.**

We are ambassadors of Christ, representing God in this foreign land.

Just as my friend at his embassy, we're in danger of losing our focus,
of getting too comfortable with the ways and values of this world,
and starting to live as if this were our permanent home.

*** The goal is to deepen our understanding and recognition of God,
and of the work of God's grace in our lives and in the world,
to which we are called to faithful and active participation.**

The source of our strength, courage and hope is the Gospel message,
that though the tenants killed the son, **the Son didn't stay dead!**

As it turns out, Jesus only told the first part of the parable.
He left off the ending. He left out the best part.
There's a final scene we learn about later,
another scene that comes with his resurrection.

**Three days after the tenants killed the vineyard owner's son,
that Son comes strolling back, alive from the grave.**

Easter is the rest of the story, **the Son rises from the grave,**
as grace and mercy overcome the ravages of greed, sin and death.
**The Son didn't stay dead in the grave,
and that one truth changes everything about everything.**

When I served a church in Washington state,
on days off, Kathy and I enjoyed hiking at Mt. Rainier.
Along the path toward the summit, it was almost always foggy.
The trail was a tough climb with steep switchbacks,
and with little to see except the trail and fog along the way.

But then there would be a particular place along the trail,
that as we hiked around a sharp turn along the summit path,
and just as we were over the cloud layer – suddenly
a clear and vast vista would open up before us---

- a long view of valleys and mountains, for we could see it all
stretched out in a panoramic awe as far as the eye could see.

*** The resurrection of Jesus is life from up above the cloud layer --
that can see the vast panorama of eternity spread out before us.**

It's the long view -- beyond struggle, death and resurrection.
It's the eternal blessings that will matter beyond the grave...
...for the false and greedy tenants have not defeated the landowner.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is about grace and renewed hope,
about promises fulfilled, for us to believe and be blessed
with courage and strength for our own resurrection
and transformation toward new possibilities and joy...
... life redefined by grace, way beyond the temporary of the vineyard.

This is our hope, the new creation, the promised Kingdom of God,
where there is change and release from all that restrains joy,
with rescue from whatever limits, corrupts or holds us back...

... as through the Holy Spirit, the power of God living within us,
Jesus is a continuing presence and person who makes us whole,

which gives us hope **amid even the worst situation and loss,**
for truly he still listens, knows and calls us each by name.

Jesus is alive, the resurrection did happen, and it has the power
to change our lives in wonderfully redemptive and gracious ways...
... because yes the resurrection changes everything.

Christ arose and we are set free to live as God's beloved people.
In spite of the terrible power of evil, greed and fear in our world,
we live in the Good News that God's love is even more powerful,
and what could be more hopeful than that?

**The resurrection of Jesus most clearly shows and demonstrates
that the things that frighten us do not have the last word.**

**The stuff and possessions of this world are temporary and won't last,
and will turn out to be worth very little
in the face of God's infinite grace, hope and promises.**

The Son is back from the grave and he's still reclaiming the vineyard!

As Paul remind us in Romans 8:31-32, 38-39

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did
not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?...

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come nor anything else in all
creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.