

Barthol Chapel and Tarves Sunday 11 October 2020

Materials for Worship



"The heavens are telling the glory of God: and the firmament proclaims his handiwork"
(Psalm 19:1)

Introduction

After our Harvest Thanksgiving last week we are returning to look at a few more of Jesus parables. Each of these stories tells us something about God's kingdom or reign of love. And each of these stories contains a challenge for those who hear it as well as an invitation to live differently today in accordance with God's purposes for creation.

Praise CH4 459 Crown him with many crowns

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| <p>1. Crown him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! How the heavenly anthem
drowns
All music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of him
Who died for thee,
And hail him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity.</p> | <p>His glories now we sing,
Who died, and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring,
And lives that death may die.</p> |
| <p>2. Crown him the Lord of life,
Who triumphed over the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
For those he came to save.</p> | <p>3. Crown him the Lord of love,
Behold his hands and side,
Those wounds, yet visible above,
In beauty glorified.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou has died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail
Throughout eternity.</p> |

The Word of God: St Matthew 21:33-46

33 '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 watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34 When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the

tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' ⁴¹They 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.' ⁴²Jesus 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"?*

⁴³Therefore 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. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection

A few years ago Sean and I visited Tuscany with friends. We began our trip with a few nights in the wine-producing region of Montepulciano. It was after dark when we arrived there. So nothing prepared us for the view the next morning when we threw back the shutters and looked out across the sunny Tuscan hillsides, covered in vines. What a view! Once we were up and about, we were able to take a closer look at the vines. They stood in neat rows, each vine deftly pruned and tended so that each one produced a large single cluster of beautiful healthy black grapes.

This week I came across a story of a village in Italy where the people grew grapes for a living. The mountain sides around the village were covered with vineyards and each family in the community contributed to the making of wine. It was some of the finest wine in the world. Each villager had their own recipe. Each family would bring their wine to the centre of town and pour it into one large keg. As a result, the wine was a mixture of many recipes which made it so unique.

One particular year the weather did not cooperate and the vineyards did not produce an abundance of grapes. One of the villagers decided that since things would be tight that year he would sell his wine elsewhere. He then filled his barrel with water and poured it into the town keg, thinking that one barrel of water in the gigantic keg would go unnoticed and not impact the outcome of the wine.

The wine in the keg, was as usual left to age for seven years. At the end of seven years the villagers all gathered around that particular keg to sell their wine to merchants who had come from all over the world. The entire community depended on the sale of their wine to provide for them until the next season. The villagers gathered around the giant keg as it was tapped. A pitcher was placed at the tap and out came nothing but pure water. It seemed that everyone in the village that year had had the same idea that year and no one

had put in any of their wine. Since everyone had so selfishly held back there was no wine to sell.

In some ways that story is not dissimilar to the parable we listened to earlier which is found in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus story also centred around a vineyard. And according to Matthew it was told by Jesus to the religious leaders who had gathered in the Temple to argue with him. They would have been very familiar with the image of the vineyard. The prophet Isaiah compared the people of Israel, to a vineyard planted and nurtured by God. And it is against this background that Jesus tells his story.

In Jesus story the Landlord very carefully prepares and equips the vineyard and then lets it out. At harvest time he sends his servants to collect his share of the fruits of the vineyard. But the tenants refuse to give the landlord his share of the grapes. They even go so far as to beat up, kill and stone the landlord's servants. Eventually the Landlord sends his son to collect what is due. But the wicked tenants decide to put the son to death, hoping they will then be able to inherit everything.

According to Matthew, Jesus then turns to his audience. And he asks them what the Landlord should do. Immediately the leaders give him their answer. "Put the wretches to a miserable death", they reply," and give the vineyard to other tenants who will share the harvest".

Jesus immediately turns the tables back upon them. They are the tenants of God's vineyard. But instead of caring and nurturing that vineyard in God's way they have acted out of their own self-interest. They have oppressed the people. They have ignored and abused God's servants, the prophets. And they will kill God's Son. And so the Landlord will indeed take the vineyard from it's them and give it to others.

Now I'm sure this parable would not make the top ten of anyone's list of favourite parables. And there is good reason for this.

Firstly, over the centuries this parable has been misinterpreted and abused by Christians to justify anti-semitism. In other words it has been suggested that the Christian Church has replaced the Jewish people in God's purposes. But look a bit closer - this story does not condemn the whole Jewish race – it is aimed at those leaders who abuse their position of trust and take for themselves the things that truly belong to God, those who will stop at nothing to protect their own position, who don't care about the life and well-being of others. This parable challenges all who treat others with selfish indifference.

Another reason that people take issue with this story is because of the violence that it contains. The servants being beaten up, killed and stoned, the son being put to death, the miserable death being sought as revenge against the wicked tenants.

But this story was never intended as a model of Christian ethics – Matthew's teaching on ethics is found elsewhere in the gospel. What we must remember is that Matthew was writing for the early Christians who were in the throes of an intense struggle with the Jewish religious leaders. They were discriminated against, oppressed and even persecuted for their belief in Jesus. One New Testament scholar points out that the violent imagery Matthew uses echoes imagery in Jewish apocalyptic writings which talk of divine judgement. This story with its powerful imagery reminds people that God is active in the

fight against injustice. And to those who are the victims of injustice, to those who are abused or oppressed or persecuted by the rich and the powerful this should come as good news.

But what does it say to us? Perhaps we should find this parable challenging us to recognise and stand up against oppressive systems. We might reflect on the way in which Covid 19 has exposed the pandemic of systemic racism that exists in our world today. While it is important to have compassion for all who suffer under oppressive structures, compassion alone is not enough. God looks to his people to engage with him in the struggle against structures that are life-limiting, life confining, life denying. Those who tenant God's vineyard must sow and nurture seeds of freedom and growth and life not only for themselves but for all people.

And one last point about this parable – think about the strange behaviour of the Landlord who time and time again reaches out to those who refuse to listen. What landlord would do this? Surely only the God who comes into the world in Jesus and turns this parable into a reality, tempering judgement with mercy and the possibility of forgiveness and a new beginning.

Wherever we live and worship and witness is a part of God's vineyard. How might we be better tenants? Can we learn to work in the vineyard in a way that is less focussed on self and encourages all people to grow and enjoy life in all its fulness?

Pointers for Prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- Those who have lost a loved one for other reasons during the pandemic
- The NHS as Covid-19 numbers rise
- The governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and their advisers
- University students and staff
- Businesses struggling and all who are facing redundancy and financial hardship
- The hospitality industry
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the increased restrictions
- Local congregations as they take difficult decisions on how and when to re-open for worship

Praise CH4 374 From heaven you came

From heaven you came helpless babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give your life that we might live.

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
“Yet not my will but yours”, he said.

*This is our God, the Servant King
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily
offering
Of worship to the Servant King.*

Come see his hands and his feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone him;

Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.

Blessing

Notices

Next Sunday 9.45am Joint Worship (Service commences 10.00am)

If you would like to be added to the e-mail list for the link to Sunday's live worship gathering on zoom or join in on your landline please contact:

Rob e-mail sessionclerk@bartholchapel.org or Susanna Tel 851345 or e-mail smbichard@aol.com.

Tuesday 13 October 11.00am Tarves Session Coffee on Zoom.

Wednesday Worship Tarves Church 2.00pm a short act of worship in the Church.

Thursday 15 October Community Bible Experience 4.00pm on when we will be discussing discoveries we make on reading Isaiah 40ff, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk.

Alpha On-line An invitation from our friends in Methlick to anyone who would like to join them. This will run on a Wednesday evening 7.30pm-8.45pm commencing 4th November. To register please contact Jeannie Price **Email:** jp222@btinternet.com or Tel 07764221414 before 30 October.

Care in the Community if you are aware of anyone in Tarves who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887. If you are aware of anyone in Barthol Chapel please contact James Hepburn 806611.

Pastoral Care If you would like to speak to the minister please contact Alison 851295.