

4 October 2020

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 5:1-7; Isaiah 21:33-43

There's another parable I read once that shines some light on Jesus's parable that we hear today about the vineyard. This other parable is about the Water of Life that wanted to make itself known to the world, and so it bubbled up from deep in the earth; it flowed without effort or limit. People who came to drink from it were refreshed and nourished, since the water was so clean and invigorating. However, people were not satisfied with this free-flowing paradise. They wanted to control it. They put a fence around it, started to charge admission, claimed ownership of the property around it, made decisions about who could come in and who couldn't, and eventually put a lock on its gates. This made the water of life angry, and so it stopped flowing within those gates, and so it bubbled up in another place. The people in that first place, however, were so engrossed in their power systems and ownership that they did not even notice that the water had moved! They continued selling the non-existent water, and few people noticed that the true power was gone. Some more sensitive and adventurous souls did notice and ventured out to find the new spring, but it wasn't long before they built a fence, limited who could drink, and so on, and the Water of Life moved on again. And so it has been since the beginning of time.

I say that sheds light on the Gospel reading, because **in its historical context, Jesus' parable of the vineyard is about the relationship of the Jewish religion to the new Christian Church.** There was a lot of hostility, sadly, between the early Christians who said Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Jewish people and those Jews who disagreed. So, stories like today's Gospel were employed to make the argument that the Water of Life, that once flowed so freely among the Jewish people, had dried up because of the closed-mindedness of their leaders—and moved on to be the Water of Life for Christians. **Gladly, I will say, our Church no longer has this hostility toward Jewish people. Much the opposite,** we honor them as the first recipients of the covenant, continuing their identity as God's chosen ones and our ancestors in faith.

Here's **another way to look at the parable,** the truth of which speaks to all times and seasons: There was a time in my life when I felt like the vineyard was taken away from me. I was very fortunate as a young man to have lots of high moments of feeling very close to God. Learning to pray in different ways, sensing God's call in my life in small ways that I could understand and which directed me to do different things. I really felt that I was following God, and it was exciting. I truly felt that I was, like I believe you are, a Beloved Child of God.

Then, it wasn't really anything bad that I did but I think **I just started getting comfortable with things and stopped pushing myself to continue praying in new ways, with intensity, and gradually stopped being on the edge of God's will,** asking regularly for him to show me the way. I never would have said this, but it was like I already knew the way. I had a great resume of history with God, and so I relied on past experiences to assure myself that I was doing really well with God. But I had stopped building.

I became aware of all this one day when I was praying with some intensity and realized I hadn't felt close to God in quite some time. And becoming aware, I felt really sad, and my prayer quickly followed as I spoke to God: **"Aren't I your beloved son anymore?"** It was a scary thought, and a wake-up call.

I realized that more than anything I wanted to be God's beloved son again, and I realized that in order to experience this I would have to recommit myself to praying and seeking his will every day. **I couldn't**

just remember the past. My renewed action would not cause God to love me again, but it would open my heart to receive the love that is always there.

This sort of story is true for us as individuals. I imagine it's **very true for marriages also**, and in family life. Not to simply remember good times past but to actively create more good times by your effort to love one another, to communicate that love, and to do things that express that love in action.

Just because we were great vineyard workers once upon a time doesn't put grapes on the table today.