

Reflections for 4th October 2020

17th Sunday after Trinity

God's Vineyard

The image of a vineyard crops up throughout the Bible, and often stands as a symbol of the nation of Israel, and the people of God. This week's Old Testament passage from Isaiah Chapter 5 is a kind of parable, and it does what a good parable will do, which is to draw the hearers into a judgement on themselves. They are invited to make a judgement on this well-tended vineyard, that yields only bad fruit, and 'brings only bitterness when asked for sweetness', and as they do that they will discover that they have also judged themselves as God's people.

The parable in the gospel reading is one of several of Jesus' stories that include a vineyard. The meaning of this parable is a challenge to the people of God to be good tenants of God's vineyard, to recognise and respect God's prophets, and his Son, and to remember that they are accountable to God for the way they live.

So what message could we take from these readings, and the image of the vineyard in the word of God? I would like to suggest three things that we may take to heart:

Everything is gift: we do not stand in our own strength, we are dependent on God for everything that we have, for life itself – and so everything that we receive, and hold, and use and share is a gift from God.

We are called to be fruitful: we are called to use all that is entrusted to us to serve God, by serving others, and especially those in need, so that our lives may 'bear fruit' for the kingdom of God.

We are accountable to God: we, like those who heard Isaiah, and those who heard Jesus, will have to account to God for our use of the gifts he has entrusted to us.

So let us pray, and act, so that by God's grace he may look at our lives and find sweetness and not bitterness, as our lives bear good fruit for his kingdom.

Revd John Waller

Father God, who gives us every good thing;
guide us in the use of all your gifts,
so that our lives may be fruitful for your kingdom,
on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 5: 1-7; Philippians 3: 4b-14; Matthew 21: 33-46

Story: The parable of the tenants in the vineyard (from the gospel reading)