

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley

Worship at Home

**A service to follow in your own place and at your own time
when you are unable to attend church in person**

1st May 2022

**Theme: Greedy or responsible tenants?
by Deacon Jenny Parnell**



Let us pray for the needs of others

We pray, Lord, for those who need to feel you close,
who need the assurance of your love,
the encouragement of your Spirit.

We remember before you those caught up in war,
and those situations that we have seen and heard about
in our world.

We pray for those who are destitute,
who are hungry,
who are refugees.

We pray for those who are in discomfort, who are afraid,
because they are ill in body, mind, or spirit.

We pray for those who are numbed, who are desolate,
because they have been bereaved.

We pray at this time of financial turmoil,
for those who have lost jobs,
those who struggle to pay bills,
and those who have the power to affect positive change.

Be with us all, Lord:
in all our daily struggles as we seek to follow you.

Be with us all, Lord:
in our periods of doubt and despair.
and in our times of happiness, health and loving.

Be with us all, Lord:
until that time when, in your Kingdom of Love,
our joy will know no end: Amen

The Blessing

The Blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Be with us now and forever more.

Amen

wanted ownership of the earth. Friendship with God was not enough; we wanted equality. Do we still want to take control? We know that this attitude has devastating results for our planet. There is an imbalance in our relationship with God and with creation. Do we sometimes try and convince ourselves that God is absent? Once we try and put God out of the picture, we abuse the earth and its resources with little or no regard for future generations. It can seem that we want ownership and never mind the consequences; we cause irreversible damage that leaves our planet groaning.

In the parable the owner of the vineyard asks the question, *“What then shall I do?”* Perhaps this is a question that each of us needs to ask ourselves too. We have caused damage but there is still hope. Like the vineyard owner, God has patience and mercy. Are we prepared to go as representatives of the rightful owner and challenge the injustice in the world that is caused by greed? Can we be involved in climate change issues as well as other social justice issues?

In the words of Gandhi, we have to be the change that we want to see in the world. Being proactive takes time and commitment. Are we servants of the rightful owner of creation? We may find ourselves like the servants in the parable, being mistreated; sadly, some even lose their lives standing up to injustice in the pursuit of peace.

For me, this parable does not end in defeat. Jesus says that the stone that the builders rejected will become the cornerstone, the foundation of the new kingdom. For me, this parable teaches us to learn the practice of repentance and to help maintain the integrity of the earth. It helps me to recognise the need to help others to recognise the authority of God and ensure that we work on God’s behalf so that we can offer him a harvest.

We are responsible for the tilling and the keeping of God’s creation. We are responsible for giving back to God by using our resources and giving our time and our talents to work with God in the world. We are responsible for caring for one another for protecting others from exploitation and injustices.

I also recognise that sometimes we succeed at these things and sometimes we fail. I realize that despite the difficulties we must not give up. I am grateful that we do not do anything alone; we are strengthened and sustained by God who is patient and merciful.

Call to Worship

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3: 22-23

Hymn StF 67 This, this is the God we adore

This, this is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable friend;
whose love is as great as his power,
and neither knows measure nor end.
‘Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
whose spirit shall guide us safe home;
we’ll praise him for all that is past,
and trust him for all that’s to come.

Joseph Hart 1712-1767

Let us pray

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40: 28-31

We thank you, loving God, that you are the everlasting God. You created a world full of beauty. A world full of vibrancy and life. A world for us to enjoy and experience in all its richness. We thank and praise you that you are a God of love and that you enfold us in that love. Help us to wait for you, to listen for you and to rest in you. As we draw close to you, reshape us and let us know that you truly love us. Forgive us, loving and compassionate God, for those times when we have moved away from your presence. Forgive us, renew us, and grant us your peace.

As Jesus taught us, we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

The Old Testament Reading is from Isaiah 5:1-2

*Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard:
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.*

The Gospel reading is from Mark 12:1-12

*Then he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country .
When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so, it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed.*

He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?

When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So, they left him and went away.

Jenny's Message

Jesus often taught using parables. Parables are wonderful as they are so open to interpretation. They invite us to question and to cogitate. This week we are looking at the parable of the wicked tenants and I offer you, my thoughts. As you read them bear in mind that God may well be offering you a different interpretation.

We are reading from the Gospel of Mark. Mark's gospel is dominated by boats. In this passage there are no physical boats but there is definitely a storm brewing and Jesus is rocking the boat by upsetting the Pharisees. In typical Markan fashion Jesus is with a crowd of people and with them are the Pharisees. They are standing in the Temple court and over one shoulder the crowd can see the Mount of Olives covered in vineyards and

over the other shoulder they would see the huge Temple. Luke 21:5 tells us how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings.

Josephus Flavius, the famous first century historian, describes the Temple door as decorated with vines in silver, gold, and jewels. He writes, *"But that gate which was at this end of the first part of the house was, as we have already observed, all over covered with gold, as was its whole wall about it; it had also golden vines above it, from which clusters of grapes hung as tall as a man's height."*¹

If you had been a first Century Jew in the crowd as Jesus was sharing this parable you would have grown up reading or hearing the words of the Hebrew prophets. You may have chanted the words of the prophet Isaiah chapter 5 vv 1-2 *"My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes."* The Jews were familiar with the imagery of vines and vineyards.

Whilst in view of this rich imagery, Jesus tells the assembled crowd that the vineyard owner prepares the vineyard, he plants it and installs a winepress where the grapes can be trampled and the juice extracted. He built a hedge and a watchtower to keep it safe and guarded. He then gives the tenants freedom to work the land. He leaves them in charge, but they know that he will return for his share of the harvest.

Things go wrong when the tenants are consumed by greed. They attack and kill the servants when they are sent to collect what is due and eventually, they kill the vineyard owner's heir too. This parable is bloodthirsty and shocking. Time and time again the attacks on the servants get progressively worse as they become more and more determined to keep control of what is not theirs.

We should be like the crowds and amazed at the patience and the mercy of the vineyard owner. I wonder how this parable spoke to you? The beauty of scripture is that when we read it or hear it, new things jump out at us. There are many and varied ways that the Bible speaks to us. Who do the different characters within the parable represent for you? What pictures, if any, do you see?

When I read this parable, my mind sees the parallels between this parable and the creation story. Humankind was given the earth and we were told that it was good. We prepared it and it was meant to sustain us. However, we, like the vineyard tenants, allowed things to go wrong. Humankind decided that we no longer wanted to be simply tenants; we

¹ Josephus Flavius, *The Wars of the Jews*, V 5: 1- 6, translated by William Whiston.