

*Faith Lutheran Church*

Sunday, October 4, 2020  
*18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost*



Welcome

Call to Worship

We gather together in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Joined together as Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us confess our sin in the presence of God and one another.

Prayer of Confession    *(please join in confessing our sins)*

**Divine God, we try to grow happily, patiently, and faithfully in the soil You have prepared for us. You feed us, shelter us, and provide for our daily needs. Yet, we often fail to offer You the fruit of our harvest. We act as though we were abandoned children, trying to make it on our own. We feel forsaken, attacked by wild boars, cut down by our enemies, and neglected in the wilderness of our lives. Yet, through it all, You remain faithful. Renew our lives once more, and we will call Your name on high.**

Declaration of Forgiveness

Precious one, be assured that God's love is sufficient. In the warmth of the sun, the fertility of the soil, and the refreshment of life-giving water, we have been given all that we need. God hears our cries, and comes to save us. Through Christ we may lay aside our sins; through Christ, we know we are safe. In the name of Christ+, your sins are forgiven. **Amen.**

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

**Beloved God, from You come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of Your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by Your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

Readings and Psalm

- **Isaiah 5:1-7**                                    *The song of the vineyard*
- **Psalm 80:7-15**                                *Look down from heaven, O God; behold and tend this vine.*
- **Philippians 3:4b-14**                        *Nothing surpasses the value of knowing Christ*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 21:33-46

*Jesus tells a parable to the religious leaders who are plotting His death, revealing that their plans will, ironically, bring about the fulfillment of scripture.*

[Jesus said to the people:] <sup>33</sup>“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. <sup>34</sup>When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. <sup>35</sup>But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup>Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup>Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup>But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' <sup>39</sup>So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup>Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" <sup>41</sup>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."

<sup>42</sup>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?'

<sup>43</sup>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. <sup>44</sup>The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

<sup>45</sup>When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they realized that He was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup>They wanted to arrest Him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded Him as a prophet.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to You, O Christ.**

### Sermon

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Typically, I perform about five to six weddings a year. Most of them occur within the prison system. This year has been different because of the coronavirus. Prison visits haven't been allowed because of the pandemic. And even couples in our communities have struggled to plan and hold a wedding this year. Venues had to decrease their capacity to conform to government orders. Caterers restricted menus based on safe handling procedures that were required while abiding by social distancing regulations. And just the possibility of an asymptomatic participant or guest attending a wedding ceremony and reception caused many couples to change their plans.

One of my requirements before performing a wedding is that couples must go through pre-marital counseling with me. Even those in the prison system. I have a nine-page booklet couples must read and answer questions to even before we meet.

One topic in the booklet is about communication and resolving conflict. *How do you and your partner resolve conflict or disagreements?* That's a question in the booklet that can take quite a bit of time to work through. Often, I've heard the response, "Pastor, we don't fight." I admire those couples. And not saying that they aren't answering *truthfully*, I always dig a little deeper. Never? Well, truth be told, most couples – if not all – *have had* conflict in their relationship. I think working through a conflict and the resolution process during the dating and engagement period may help the couple understand what they may have to deal with once they are married.

My point in the question is to have them talk about how they handle conflict. Does one or both scream? Swear? Carry on? Throw dishes or punch the wall? Walk away in silence or disgust? Give up and let the other one “win”?

I prefer to walk away. Walk away and let things settle down before I say something I may regret later. Don't sweep it under the rug but discuss it when tempers have cooled. Of course, my husband and I don't have conflict. (*Wink wink.*)

How do *you* handle conflict in your relationships with your loved ones, your workmates, your school friends, your neighbors, your personal friends? Some deal with conflict very well while others – well, it just ends badly.

In our gospel reading for today from Matthew 21, there is a conflict occurring. We just heard the details. A landowner plants a vineyard, digs the winepress, and does everything else one would need to do to have a decent harvest. Then he leases the vineyard to tenants to run things while he goes away. After the harvest, he sends his servants to collect what is his legal possession. The tenants decide they want possession and so they beat, stone, and kill the servants.

The landowner sends more servants and the same thing happens; they are beaten, stoned, and killed.

So, the landowner sends his son. Surely the tenants will listen to *him*, correct? Wrong.

For whatever reason, the tenants think that, if they kill the heir, they will receive possession of the vineyard. When the son arrives to receive what is due his father, he also is killed.

So many questions run through my mind about this parable. Why in the world would the tenants think they could get away with this? They did get away with it when the first servants were sent, killed, and there were no repercussions. They got away with it a second time by killing more servants. And it sounds like they were going to get away with it a third time by killing the man's son.

Did they know the landowner had only one son? Did they think the landowner didn't have any more servants to send? And why in the world would the landowner, after his first servants were beaten, stoned and killed, send more servants and then his own son? Did he think they would be treated any differently?

When Jesus finished this parable, he asked the people, “when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They answered, of course, the landowner would do the same – kill the tenants and lease the land to someone else; someone more reputable.

The conflict, like often is discussed in pre-marital counseling, could have been avoided from exploding. If the tenants were unhappy with the arrangements the landowner had made with them, it seems they should have sat down, had a conversation, and worked it out. Instead, they exacerbated the situation by killing the servants. The conflict grew when more servants were sent to get the landowner's rightful claim and more servants were killed. And then the landowner's son was killed.

A colleague shared, “This conflict, this small fire between Jesus and the Pharisees, began early in His ministry. It was right after the call of Matthew where Jesus had dinner with the so-called scum of society: the tax collectors, and other sinners, and prostitutes. Right at the very beginning of Jesus'

ministry, Jesus was hanging out with the wrong people, in the eyes of the Pharisees. Pretty soon Jesus was doing *other* inappropriate things to offend the Pharisees. He violated the Sabbath regulations that the Pharisees were imposing on the people. Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. As early in the Jesus story as Mark 3:6, the New Testament says that the “Pharisees held counsel with the Herodians how to destroy Him.

“In other words, from the ‘get-go,’ the Pharisees were out to kill Jesus. From the ‘get-go,’ the Pharisees were so secretly angry at Jesus that they wanted to kill Him. I don’t think that Jesus perceived at that moment how intense the Pharisees hatred of Him was.

“Three years passed and that conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was growing hotter and hotter by the week and finally in the last week of Jesus’ ministry, it was to the exploding point.” And that is the parable Jesus shares with them today.

When the Pharisees and the chief priests heard this parable, they realized it was about them. Was against them. Was calling out them. They wanted to have Jesus arrested right then but they feared the crowds. They had to wait. Until another time, a better time, when hopefully Jesus would be alone, when the crowd wasn’t around, in the Garden of Gethsemane. *Then* they would have Jesus arrested and have Him killed.

See, that was the Pharisee’s goal all along. Their goal was to kill Jesus. Kill the Son. The landowner’s Son. God’s *only* Son. They had already silenced the prophets and killed the messengers of the owner. Now they were plotting to kill the Son. God sent Jesus, the heir of the vineyard, the future owner of the vineyard, and, as we know, He, too, was killed.

Do we see ourselves in this parable? Do we silence the messengers of God by ignoring those who speak truth to us and criticize us as being fake? We have people who will be honest with us – whether we want them to or not. But do we listen to them?

I’d have to say that my messenger from God is most often my husband. I can count on him to tell me the truth about my actions; what I say and what I do. I listen to him whether I like to hear what he says or not. He is my sounding board when I’m struggling with criticism from others. He helps me work through constructive criticism and listens to me to process the situation before a conflict arises.

We live in a time where it doesn’t take much for a conflict to arise. We struggle to find peace in our lives and hope in our world. We let others around us tell us what to think and to say and to do. We forget that God is in charge. We forget that we must put our trust and our faith in God. We forget to pray as we should and to whom we should.

From Psalm 107:19-22, we hear, “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and *He saved them* from their distress; <sup>20</sup> He sent out His word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. <sup>21</sup> Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love, for His wonderful works to humankind. <sup>22</sup> And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of His deeds with songs of joy.”

During this troubled time that we are living in, let your hearts and your minds focus on Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world, who lived, who died, and who rose again in victory so that the conflicts of this world might be a mere stepping stone to our heavenly kingdom. Amen.

### **Blessing**

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

### **Prayers of Intercession**

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

Holy God, You call us to work for peace and justice in Your vineyard. Refresh the church with Your life, that we may bear fruit through work and service.

Thank you for the abundant harvest of the earth. Bless and care for those whose hands bring the fruits of the earth to the tables of all who hunger. May we be inspired by Your servants who cared deeply for your creation.

Curb the impulses of greed and pride that lead us to take advantage of others. Grant that world leaders seek the fruits of the kingdom for the good and welfare of all people.

Sustain all who suffer with the promise of new life. Assured of Your presence, heal our pain and suffering, and equip us to embrace all bodies aching for wholeness of mind, body, and soul. We call to mind those who are struggling today; physically, financially, emotionally, and spiritually, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices... (please name your prayer concerns).

We pray for all managers in our community and for all who seek employment. Give hope and a future to those who lack meaningful work, those who have been marginalized or abused in the workplace, and those who desire new opportunities.

Thank you for the saints who teach us to live faithfully in Your vineyard. May our chorus join theirs until our labor is complete.

Listen as we call on You, O God, and enfold in Your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Our Lord's Prayer**

*I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...*

**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, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen**

### **Offering**

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

**Offertory Prayer** (*please join in prayer*)

**Forgiving God, people give for so many reasons – joy, guilt, obligation, gratitude, obedience, hope, control, thankfulness. Remind us of Your call to examine everything that we have; after all, our money and possessions are really gifts from You. You call us to use them wisely – to share them openly – to give them generously. So, thank You for this celebration of giving. Receive this offering and release us from the foolish temptation to believe that it is best spent on ourselves. Amen.**

**Benediction**

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

**Dismissal**

Go in peace, serving Christ by serving one another.

**Thanks be to God.**

Sources:

[www.presbyterianmission.org](http://www.presbyterianmission.org)

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