**04 October 2020 Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity**

**Collect**

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself,
and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, Amen.

**Gospel Matthew 21.33-46**

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 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. 34When 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**

This parable does not make easy bedtime reading. The workers in the vineyard seem to be an entirely nasty bunch. Surely when they agreed to take on the vineyard, they knew exactly what was expected of them? In Jesus’ time the rent for the land was usually paid in the produce from the harvest. So, the owner was acting in good faith to send his servants to collect. But what is going on if the tenants believe that they can reset the original terms of the agreement, and to murder the servants? Moreover, what was going on in the mind of the owner to send a second lot of servants, and then his heir to the vineyard, knowing the fate of the others? Once the tenants had killed, what would stop them from repeating the crime?

This parable is about life and death, it is about the Kingdom of God and our place as heirs, but it has a darkness about it too. If we are to be vulnerable enough to give our lives to God, we should expect that there may well be danger, persecution and even death. And yet so many did embrace this life, with all its challenges. The early Christians were a people on the edge, they literally diced with death, were persecuted, and executed. But still the power and love of God weighed the balance in favour of embracing the potential for evil, as the good was worth the cost.

A second theme of this parable is fairness. Was it fair that the owner was not paid rent? Was it fair that the owner sent so many to death? Was it fair that the owner sent his son and heir to die? Was it fair that some will get to the kingdom by the grace of God and the love of God rather than as a reward for long service in church?

As Jesus tells his people that those who produce the fruits of the kingdom will inherit, we hear again the song of Mary, the Magnificat – the rich shall be sent empty away, the hungry shall be filled, the humble and meek shall be raised up. I can hear Mary cheering him on – hurrah, “that is my son, with whom I am well pleased” for this can be heard by his mother as much as his Father!

How do we understand this reading for us today? Some are fixed on the image of fairness, “we deserve to be rewarded, we have cared and worked to make the church, the community to be what we want!” But the problem is that God knows what he wants of the whole world, the whole human race, and of you and I – to love God, love neighbour as ourselves, to build a community fit for the Kingdom.

To see the Kingdom break out everywhere, and know that the child, the drug addict and the gambler are as much part of ushering in the Kingdom as the bishop, priest, the faithful church people. That is God’s idea of fairness, for He loves each one of us as His children, nothing we can do will make us worthy or deserving of that love, and nothing we can do or say that will stop God loving us.

That is the sort of fairness that makes it worth facing persecution, danger and perhaps even death for, that is the sort of love that is a Kingdom value and it can be ours. But to fully embrace this we need to have the courage to be people who live on the very edge, the edge that holds onto the world as it is, and the world is could become under the rule of God’s love. The world that Jesus gave his life for, that he rose to give hope and a promise of a future. The world that has so sadly forgotten the place of God,

How brave are you? Can you help one another to live this life? “to be vulnerable enough to give our lives to God, we should expect that there may well be danger, persecution and even death.” And then can we “embrace this life, with all its challenges” and so become “a people on the edge” – because that is where we shall find Jesus, on the edge holding out his hand to us, asking us to join him in the great adventure of love.

**Prayers from the Anglican Chaplaincy**

**A prayer for the Corona Virus situation**

Merciful God, we pray for the many people who have contracted the coronavirus in China, in Spain and in other parts of the world.  Bring comfort to those grieving loved ones have died and peace to those worried, fearful and uncertain as the virus spreads.  We also pray for governments and authorities who are developing strategies to contain and deal with the virus and those in the health services who may be risking their own lives to care for sick patients.

Here in the Cornwall we especially pray for the Corona Virus situation and the procedures that have been put into force to try to halt its spread. Help us all to be responsible in the things that we do in our lives to prevent the spread of the virus by taking heed of the recommended precautions and avoiding situations which may make things worse.

Holy God you made our world to be like a vineyard and choose a people to be its tenants.  May we who are now the workers in that vastly changed vineyard prove to be worthy of the work you trust us to do in Jesus’ name.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Mighty God, we pray for our church; that Christ may be the cornerstone of all that we do in his name.  May we, his living church be the solid blocks of a spiritual community which continues to hold fast in an ever secular world.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Creator God as we pray for our world we especially pray for all who like St Paul have suffered the loss of all things for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ.  We raise before you organisations which aids Christians living under persecution or in threatening environments with finance and prayers. We join our prayers with them as we ask for courage and strength for all persecuted Christians, their communities and churches.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Father God, we thank you for the joy of human love, and for all those among whom we live and work.  We pray particularly for loved ones who worry us with their health, or circumstances, or life direction. We pray for those among our friends and families who do not know you, or whose faith has been shaken.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Gracious God, friend of those in need, your Son Jesus can free us from our burdens and heal our bodies and spirits. We pray for those still burdened, those seeking healing, those in need within the church and the world. We pray too for those suffering from the Corona Virus, the Health Service struggling to cope with the Pandemic and all those simply living in the fear of contracting it.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Merciful God, as we pray for all departed this life help us to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. May those who have shared his sufferings have become like him in his death, and through that suffering and sharing attained the resurrection from the dead.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Faithful God, as we move into the coming week to live and work for the Gospel, help us to travel onwards with our eyes on the goal, to that place where you are beckoning us, onward to Jesus.

Merciful father: **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  Amen**

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All Souls is coming soon, if you want someone named at our celebration this year please let me know. With every blessing, Vanda