

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 13, 2016

St. Luke 20:9-19

Jesus Came to His Own but They Rejected Him

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Dear Friends in Christ,

According to the ancient church calendar, today was called Passion Sunday. The name referred to intensification in the remembrance of our Savior's Passion. Our gospel relates an increase of hatred by Jesus' enemies that led them to arrest our Lord at the end of the week. The reason they waited that long? "They knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people."

Everything pointed to the fulfillment of the Apostle John's words about Jesus in the first chapter of his Gospel, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." [11] There is our theme. **Jesus Came to His Own but They Rejected Him.** This was one of their final calls to repentance. This explains the week's events.

It was Tuesday of Jesus' final week on earth. He was preaching and teaching in the temple courts. The Jewish leadership questioned Jesus about his authority to do that. Rather than explain his actions to them, our Savior related this parable of the tenants to the crowd within their earshot.

Among the crowd were pilgrims from many countries in Jerusalem for Passover. Jesus' picture of the vineyard would have been familiar to them. The patient owner had allowed sufficient time for the vines to mature and produce. Then he sent a servant to the farmers tending those vines to gather rent from them in the form of some of those fruits. The owner had every right to do so. He fully expected willing cooperation with his servant who represented him.

The tenants cared nothing for their covenant with the owner. They not only refused to give his servant the fruits, they also abused him. They literally tore his skin off and severely wounded him. The tenants mistreated a servant not only once but three times. Their blatant disregard and mistreatment of the servants really was hatred directed toward the owner.

People ask me if those who heard Jesus' parables understood what he was talking about; some did and some did not. St. Luke tells us that the teachers of the law and the chief priests here absolutely understood Jesus' words. What they did not understand was this parable was one of their final calls to repentance. Isaiah had written that Israel was "the vineyard of the LORD," and "the men of Judah are the garden of his delight." God had sent prophets over the centuries to gather the fruits of faith from this garden. Time and time again, the nation persecuted those prophets who represented God. The nation ignored their word and physically harmed them.

The owner of the vineyard did not give up on the tenants. Finally, he sent his own son to the tenants. He gave them another chance. What love for them in spite of their rejecting the servants. What love of God to send his own Son to Israel, Jesus' own people, in spite of their having rejected the Old Testament prophets all the way through John the Baptist. Jesus' came to his own but they rejected him. This was one of their final calls to repentance.

Israel refused and killed the Son just like the prophets; just like in Jesus' parable the tenants killed the son like the servants. That is how this parable explains the week's events. The tenants' rejection of even the son led to the owner sharing his vineyard with others. The crowds who heard the parable said, "May this never be." They understood what was going to happen to Israel because of their rejection of Jesus. God did take his kingdom and share it with the Gentiles.

Our Lord turned his attention to the crowd and asked them to explain the meaning of Psalm 118:22. They would be well aware of these words about the stone the builders rejected becoming the capstone or cornerstone. People sang this song at the dedication of a new building. Israel rejected Jesus and he now became the cornerstone of the New Testament living church, the spiritual body of Christ. That stone, Jesus, would break those who were offended by him. He would crush those who rejected him. The chief priests and teachers of the law knew Jesus was referring to them.

Jesus' own rejected him and this explains the meaning of the week's events. The love of God staggers our imaginations. God used the rejection of his Son to accomplish his purpose of redemption for the entire world.

Like the son the tenants killed, Israel put Jesus to death on the hill we call Calvary. In him there is hope. He is the foundation of the kingdom of God we now enjoy as members of Christ. In him there is forgiveness and salvation for Jew and Gentile alike through faith.

How urgent is it for us to listen to God's Word. We welcome God's Son into our hearts by the gospel that creates faith. Then as the tenants of God's vineyard today, we will welcome those who speak for the Father. We will not reject the Son and think the vineyard belongs to us. We will recognize our God's right to expect fruits of righteousness from us. The parable shows the Savior's Passion is our call to repentance. It explains the meaning of our Savior's Passion we have been looking at during our midweek services and mediate upon every Sunday.

Today we intensify our thoughts toward our Lord's Passion as Holy Week approaches. Passion Sunday is a fitting name indeed. Amen. <SDG>