

October 8, 2023 (Pentecost 19 A)

Matthew 21:33-43
“Notice of EVICTION”

If you want to rent an apartment or a home to live in – there’s a **legal contract** you enter into. The renter has certain obligations that must be met. If you don’t pay the rent, or if you violate the rental agreement in some way – *in a mere 3 days* (here in Texas at least) you can receive a NOTICE OF EVICTION. Once that notice is up, the legal proceedings are underway – and you could be kicked out in as soon as 30 days.

In our **Gospel Lesson** today, we hear Jesus telling the people another parable as He taught the crowds about the Kingdom of Heaven during those last few days before He’d bear the sin of the world and offer His life as the ransom price for our souls. In this particular parable He’s addressing the religious leaders of Israel again – and basically giving them a NOTICE OF EVICTION. Notice the first paragraph of our lesson;
Matthew 21:33-34 (NIV)

33 “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

God (the Landowner) had fulfilled His duties perfectly. God had done EVERYTHING for them. He chose Abraham to be the father of the nation that would be His chosen people. They were **no better** than anyone else in essence, and Abraham too was a sinful human being. But it was a choice of God’s grace – part of His loving plan to bring salvation to the world in Jesus.

He had put a wall around Israel with the Laws and practices He gave them. He watched over them and protected them. They had His presence; His saving Truth among them. All because of His love and that they might be a beacon to the world: *“HERE’S where you can find out about the REAL Lord and Creator of all!”* He wanted these people to produce **fruits of Righteousness**; to be pure and holy – BUT – the tenants of God’s Vineyard did not live up to what THEY had promised, and they did not produce the fruit that God wanted. In fact, they *never* fully abided by that bi-lateral contract God had set up with His Old Testament people – not even during the golden age of King David and Solomon. But . . . as you read through the Old Testament you’ll see – it just kept getting worse and WORSE – just as Jesus described in the following verses.

Verses 35-39 The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to

them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

They not only failed to produce fruit and put God’s light out to the world – they *persecuted* God’s messengers and failed to listen to them. They were absolutely horrible to faithful servants like *Elijah, and Elisha*. You can read about how they treated God’s spokesmen like *Isaiah and Jeremiah*. The majority of the people refused to listen to them and repent, producing the fruits of faith that God wants. When *John the Baptist* came, many (including the spiritual leaders) also rejected him, and of course, they plotted and schemed to get rid of *God’s Chosen One – the long promised Messiah, Jesus*. They wanted Him dead. They felt that THEY were in charge of God’s Kingdom and they would let nothing threaten their power and question their authority – not even the Son of God Himself. We see their **horrible behavior** and cruelty – along with God’s *supernatural patience* here over so many years. So . . . Jesus then asks them: **Verses 40-41**

“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41 “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

They could *see* the wretchedness of the servants in Jesus’ story – but they were so spiritually BLIND that they just couldn’t see that wretchedness in themselves. So Jesus makes it *REALLY CLEAR* in the closing verses of our text (Verses 42-43) by quoting **Psalm 118:22-23** and applying it directly to them. **42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”**

There’s the NOTICE OF EVICTION. They would not accept or allow Jesus to be the Capstone – they rejected *Him*. So . . . God finally rejected them. His great patience was about to run out. In just a few days the Notice would go up (you can imagine it there standing above Jesus’ Head on the cross: “the King of the Jews”) . . . then 50 days later at Pentecost it would actually *happen* – His Vineyard was taken away from them and would go out across the globe. The Gentile nations would now get to enjoy serving in God’s Vineyard; producing fruit for Him, enjoying His Salvation, and proclaiming His Truth.

You won’t find the One True Lord in synagogues anymore. You won’t find Him proclaimed and worshipped on the Temple Mount of

Jerusalem anymore. You won't find Him in mosques where Muhammad is the capstone and not Christ. You won't find Him *anywhere Christ is cast aside* and not the FOCAL POINT on which everything holds together. You won't find Him in "Christian" places of worship where Jesus is pushed aside and pulled out as that Capstone. Wherever the desire for compromise or the need for public approval and popularity has booted Christ off His Throne – He won't be found anymore.

Thankfully, you CAN find Him **here**. He is the CAPSTONE among us and God's plan of Salvation through Jesus is **marvellous in our eyes!** His Vineyard is right HERE. Everything we do and everything we stand for is about Him and what HE did for us and the world. We are fed and nourished by His Word of Truth and we seek to produce the fruit He wants from us, and to be a beacon for His light and truth so people can find out about the REAL Lord and Creator of us all right **here**, among us, in places like our humble little church.

Every time we gather, we focus on God's Word and today our lesson is this NOTICE OF EVICTION. So . . . *what is God telling us here?* He's given His Kingdom to **us**. His Word and saving Truth is among **us**. He's done everything for us. He chose us to be His own, though we don't deserve it and we're no better than anyone else. He found us and brought us into His Kingdom of believers by the power of His Spirit in Word and Baptism.

He wants us, the **tenants** of HIS Church / workers in His Vineyard – here in 2023 to produce spiritual fruit. **Galatians 5:22-23** tells us what that fruit consists of: ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*** As God's people produce *that* fruit, He shines the beacon of His light and truth out to the world through us that He might save more people.

He even pours out on us an abundance of material possessions and wealth – so that we might use a good portion off the top for the work of shining His light of truth to the world. *BUT – whoa, wait a minute – WE think it's all OURS. We work hard for it. We sometimes act like God's work can get done with the leftovers from the bottom, and if there's nothing left at all then – TOO BAD.* We too have failed to listen to God's messengers and God's Word. We too have thought our offerings were to keep the lights on here in our church – as opposed to them being fruits offered to our Lord in thanksgiving. We too have felt like this is OUR church – *not His*. Likewise we have mistakenly thought that our lives actually belong to **us** – *not Him*.

So . . . what do YOU make of this **NOTICE OF EVICTION** – as it stands before us here in His Word today? ***There's only 2 ways we can react to it:***

1. The way the PHARISEES did. They didn't want to hear it. So they pushed Him aside and would not let Him be the Capstone. They wanted things THEIR way and would not listen. They wanted the Kingdom / the Church / their lives – for themselves. So . . . God took the Kingdom away from them.
2. OR – we could take the NOTICE OF EVICTION to heart and **repent** of our failure to give God what we owe Him. Let's not test His patience anymore! His patience, thankfully, is HUGE – but there is a point where it runs out.

I'm sure He could find better people to fill these pews and I'm certain He could find a better pastor to serve you. But, here, today, because of His grace and patience alone . . . He's got us. He's put up with us to this point. He's the most patient, loving, generous, kind and forgiving **Landlord** you could ever imagine. He sent CHRIST *for* us to pay the bill we owe God and cancel out all our spiritual debt. He is, quite simply, the GREATEST. ***His Kingdom is still here*** (and we are still workers in His Vineyard) – purely and completely because of His love and mercy and NOT AT ALL because we have earned it or deserved it.

Let's approach God with humble and penitent hearts – hearts that take His strong warning seriously and understand what our place truly is. Let Jesus take all your guilt and all your sin. He came to die for sinners like you and me. Receive His blood-bought peace, forgiveness and mercy – He wants you to have it.

Then . . . take His words seriously and listen to what His messengers tell us. Get to WORK producing the FRUIT God wants. Let's be the kind of **tenants** He desires as our lives produce ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*** Let's strive to show a bit of God's incredible patience with our brothers and sisters in the pews / with our family members / with all those around us. God will be shining THROUGH us and our efforts to bring more souls to His Kingdom and ultimately to His eternal home.

Working in His VINEYARD is the privilege of a lifetime! So let's do the work He wants and produce the fruit He delights in as we keep Jesus (the Capstone) on center stage and do everything to His Glory and for the benefit of HIS Kingdom. My friends let's give God the BEST we possibly can – because He gave us His Son, and there is nothing better than being workers in His Vineyard with the short time that we have down here.