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Fifth Sunday in Lent
17 March 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Lk 20:9-20

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Well, it's St. Patrick's Day.

A day for green beer, shamrocks, leprechauns, and pots of gold found at the end of rainbows.

The day's become a party—

so much so that a couple years ago,

when it landed during Holy Week,

the Pope moved the day so that festivities could continue—

not interrupting the Passion of Christ.

There are St. Patty's Day parades and parties—

and lots and lots of drinking.

It pulls out the Irish in all of us—

yes, even you Germans enjoy a day of beer, corned beef, and cabbage.

It's all fun, but what does it have to do with Jesus?

Well, I'll tell you one way in particular that it *doesn't* have to do with Jesus.

The other day I saw church bulletin board with a rainbow and a pot of gold.

The words above the picture read:

"Jesus is the pot of gold."

It was a parable.

Jesus was the treasure, and we—presumably—were the leprechaun seeking the treasure.

We would look far and wide;

we'd follow rainbows until their end—

hopefully finding *Jesus*.

That sort of parable does no one any good.

And worse yet, it goes against everything the Scriptures say.

Jesus isn't the treasure at the end of some rainbow.

You're not to go seeking until you find Him.

You're not to search far and wide.

With this sort of parable, everything is about you—

and you're just miserable.

If it were up to you, you'd search for this treasure at the bottom of a Guinness bottle,

or behind the fifth helping of dessert and say you found Him!

You'd search for Him wherever you felt most comfortable; or wherever's most convenient.

In the end, you'd follow the rainbow pointing to yourself—and then exclaim, "*Here He is!*"

Repent.

That's not what God is like.

So on this St. Patrick's day, let's turn the parable around.

Jesus is that ugly little leprechaun—with no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him—
and He is sent by His Father to search far and wide *for you!*

You are His treasure; you are the pot of gold—
the pot of gold that doesn't lift a finger to find its owner;
but the pot of gold, nonetheless, worth more to God than anything else in the world—
worth so much that the Father will send His Son even into the grave to find you.

And while we're running the parable of the pot of gold this way, we might as well look at the parable given to us in our Gospel reading.

All the parables work this way.
All of them are about Christ for you.

And today's no different.

There are 4 characters:
The owner of the vineyard,
The wicked tenants,
The servants,
and the Son.

We run this parable wrong when we see ourselves as the owner.
We've got it all backward when it's a story about our persistence and fighting for what is right.

We get it right, however, when God the Father is the patient owner of the vineyard.
And if we read our Scriptures better, we'd know that the vineyard is the Church—
His chosen Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7).

Our God has a vineyard, that He lets out to tenants.

The wicked tenants are ultimately Satan and his cohort of demons.
These tenants work only by force and coercion.
Certainly, real people serve as the tenants—but only as pawns or puppets for Satan's plans.
They operate under his murderous rules.
They prohibit anyone to question their authority.
They silence the opposition.
They lie and steal and change the rules so that they can't be pinned down.
And in the end, they murder.
That's the rule of Satan—hence the title, *the wicked tenants*.

Many real people have filled this office of *Wicked Tenant*.

This parable takes place immediately after Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem.

It's probably Palm Sunday or shortly after.

As we approach the Passion, the betrayal, and the cross—

we see these wicked tenants in the Pharisees, and the Scribes, and the Sanhedrin.

Pilate is among them, and so is Judas.

Now, Luke says, *when the time came*.

That time is the *right time*, the *appointed time*, the time determined by God for fulfillment.

St. Paul uses this same word for time when he says,

“*For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.*” (Rom 5:6)

It's at this *time* that the owner, God the Father, sent servants to the vineyard to collect its fruit.

The servants are His Prophets.

They bear His Word; they ask for the fruit of repentance and joy.

That's what the owner is all about, remember: *Joy*.

Vineyards are good for one thing only: wine.

And wine is best when its shared in abundance, and when joy spreads to all.

But rather than getting any fruit, any wine, the servants were rejected, and left empty-handed.

The Prophets called for repentance and joy;

but “*Jerusalem is the city that kills the prophets, and stones those sent to it*” (Lk 13:34).

But the owner is obnoxiously patient.

He sends prophet after prophet after prophet.

If you ever pick up the OT you get horribly annoyed.

It's all so clear—why don't they get it?

But then the Owner has an idea: “*What shall I do?*”

If we were left to answer that we'd come up with a drastically different answer.

What should you do?

“*Get off your rear end and take care of it Yourself!*

Call in the authorities, bring out the guns, change the regime—force 'em out!”

Instead, He says,

“*I will send my beloved Son;*

perhaps they will respect Him.” (20:13)

The difference between the Owner's plan and ours is clearest here.

In our way of doing things we'd never send Jesus.

Of course they'll kill Him.

He's just one more nuisance in their lust for power.

He's just one more casualty, one more stumbling block on their way to the top.

When they see the Beloved Son, the tenants say,
“This is the heir. Let us kill Him, so that the inheritance may be ours.” (20:14)

This sort of refrain will be heard next week:
“His blood be on us and on our children!” (Mt 27:25)

So, having it their way, *they threw Him out of the vineyard—
 crucifying Him outside Jerusalem—
 and killed Him.*

The parable is left with a “now what?”
 Once the Son is dead, what will the Owner do?
He’ll come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

Who will be destroyed?
 Anyone that would rather be god on his or her own terms.
 The one who rejects the stone that is raised to being the Cornerstone.

This parable is directed first against the chief priests and scribes, along with the elders of Israel.
 But then it’s directed against all who believe that what they have is theirs—
 that they’ve gotten it, they’ve earned it, they’ve measured up and done the time.

It’s directed against all the elder brothers from the story of the Prodigal.
 It’s directed against those grumbling who worked from the 1st hour and were paid the same as
 those who came at the 11th hour.
 It’s against us when we’d rather God strike lighting on our enemies than bring their repentance.
 It’s against us when we’d rather not have the suffering Jesus, but the almighty God.
 It’s against us when we’d rather keep Jesus out of the picture.

But this is a parable entirely *for us*,
 precisely because the Father won’t have Jesus out of the picture.

He won’t have the Son safely on the sidelines—
 but He marches Him right on into the Lion’s Den, into the ban of ruthless men,
 into the vineyard run by wicked tenants, and onto the cross.

That’s the only defeat of Satan that will do.
 That’s the only victory worth having—
 the one that comes by Christ.

And so the vineyard has been given to others.
 It’s been removed from those lusting after power and control,
 and given to those who receive it as gift—
 it’s been given to us.

Let us then bring forth fruits of repentance, wine for joy, and gather at the feast of the Son!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit