

St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 7, 2019
Luke 20:9-19

He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.'" The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

I would never...you fill in the blank. I would never cheer for an opposing team. I would never say something mean about someone I like. I would never neglect my relationship with my Lord. There are things in life which we promise ourselves never to do such as cheer for a hated rival or say something mean about someone or neglect our relationship with our Lord. Yet, what does life often teach us? Doesn't it teach us we really shouldn't make a habit about using the word never?

Your team is on the verge of clinching a playoff spot, but things need to fall just right for them to make it. What is one of the things which needs to happen? Your hated rival needs to win. Still rooting against them? A person hurts you deeply. You are talking freely with someone you trust. Would you be able to hold your tongue? Think you'll never neglect your relationship with your Lord? A noble goal and Jesus will help us focus on being able to say, "May this never be."

Jesus is teaching our parable on Tuesday of Holy Week. It is an incredibly stressful time for him. He knows what is coming. He knows he will soon be arrested, beaten, tried and murdered on a cross. It is a difficult time, but what do we find him doing? He is teaching the people. However, his enemies are jealous of him and his popularity. They spend a good deal of the day trying to discredit him and his teaching. Long before today they had rejected him and they wanted the people to do the same.

What is Jesus' response to his enemies' attacks? He responds with love by telling them the story in our gospel lesson which shows us what happens when someone neglects their relationship with the Lord and why our prayer is that may this never be. **"(Jesus) went on to tell the people this parable: 'A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard.'"**

"But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out." Jesus' story is about a man with extraordinary love. This man rents out his vineyard to some tenants, goes away on a journey and expects to receive a portion of the harvest when it is harvest time.

However, the tenants are wicked. They mistreat and abuse the first servant sent to them. What would a normal reaction be? Wouldn't it be to have those tenants arrested? I would think so, but how does the landowner respond? He sends another servant who is treated in a similar fashion. The landowner sends a third and he is treated even worse. The actions in the story don't make sense. The landowner seems way too patient and the tenants' ingratitude is foolish and selfish.

What is Jesus' point? Jesus is showing us one of the dangers of neglecting God's word. Jesus' story is a story about God's relationship with the nation of Israel. Israel, who prided itself on being called God's chosen people, had turned its back on him. They were God's people in name only and their hearts were far from him. God in love sent prophets to his people to try and win them back, but the Israelites mistreated God's messengers because their hearts were far from God and they didn't want to listen.

What dangers does Jesus reveal to us with the first part of his story? Doesn't he reveal what can happen to Christians who neglect God's word? They may still consider themselves God's people, but their words

and actions reveal they despise God's word. How so? They attack God's messengers who say things they don't want to hear. They say the church needs to change and adapt her teachings to meet 21st Century lifestyles. They ignore repeated calls of concern for their souls.

Does this reflect your life or heart? I don't know and my prayer for you is may this never describe you, but what if it does describe your heart? What if you have despised God's word or got angry at his messengers or wanted the church to change its teachings to ignore yours or another's sins? Where can you turn? Look at God's patience. He doesn't write you off immediately. He sends multiple messengers to you to correct you and lead you back to him. Thank God for his love for you.

Jesus' story isn't done. He continues on. **"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."** The owner has had his messengers rejected and what does he decide to do? His love leads him to send his son.

What would possess the owner to send his son? His servants had already been rejected. Would the fact he sent his son change anything? The answer is a quick and resounding no. The tenants expose the wickedness which resides in their hearts and kill the son. Their warped thinking led them to think they would be the rightful heirs. Would they be? **"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."** Nope.

Did you figure out who the son is? It is Jesus himself. Why does Jesus now turn the focus on to him? It is because he wants us to see what the next step is after you neglect and despise God's word. Neglect and despising God's word leads us to reject God's love. I don't think people who calls themselves Christians want to willingly reject God's love. They like being called God's people and thinking God loves them, but do you really love or even need God when you despise his word?

What do I mean? Well, what is the reason Jesus came into this world? Didn't he come to save you from your sins and me from mine? Yes, absolutely, but what if we don't define sin the same way he does? What if we say, "Jesus, I know you call living together outside of marriage or getting drunk or thinking I'm better than other people or only hearing your word when I feel like it sin, but I don't. I don't think something which makes me feel good can be wrong." What are we saying to Jesus?

Aren't way saying to Jesus, "I don't need you."? I know you define sin a certain way, but I don't need a savior from something you call sin and I don't. Thanks for being my savior, Jesus, but no thanks. I'll be just fine on my own. Ouch. Am I being over dramatic? A little too harsh? No, despising God's word about sin leads you to reject God's love for you. It turns Jesus into a tire jack which bails you out when you get stuck rather than being your savior from sin. May this never be.

Is your heart heavy because you understand that you have misused and abused Jesus' love? Your words and actions said to Jesus, "Thanks for calling yourself my savior, but no thanks."? Where is your comfort in this story? Well, when does Jesus tell this story? It is Tuesday of Holy Week. Who is he speaking it to?

He is speaking it to the crowds, but he is also speaking it to his enemies. Where is the comfort? Jesus' love continues to reach out to his enemies who have rejected him.

Jesus knew these men were plotting to kill him. He knew their hearts were far from God, but what does he do? He pleads with them not to go through with it. He begs them to repent and not to reject God's love. He could have rationalized these men weren't worth it, but just like the landowner he didn't. He came to reach out to them and call them back. Jesus does the same for those who still reject his love today. His love drove him to die for those who reject him to forgive them.

Jesus' last words in his story show us the urgency of his appeal. **“Jesus looked directly at them and asked, ‘Then what is the meaning of that which is written: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone’? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.’”** Jesus concludes by showing us what will happen to those people who have rejected his love. They will be crushed by his judgment.

It is a fitting conclusion to the story. Despising God's word leads to rejecting his love which leads to being crushed by God's judgment. God defines sin according to his standard and not according to ours. Jesus' conclusion shows us what will happen if we try to define sin our way rather than God's. We will be crushed by God's judgment because we cannot match up to God's perfect standard. It is a fitting conclusion to the story and again draws the prayer may this never be from our lips.

What is the only way to avoid being crushed by God's judgment? The only way to avoid God's judgment is by trusting in the savior he sent. Jesus is the savior we need because he lived up to God's perfect standard. He is the savior from everything God calls sin and not everything we try to excuse or claim isn't sin. His love drove him to die for us and take away our sins even of despising his word, rejecting his love and making ourselves worthy of his judgment. Thank God for Jesus' love.

There are certain things in life which we never expect to happen. Cheering for a hated rival? Nope. Saying something bad about someone we like? Hope not. Neglecting our relationship with our Lord? May this never be, but life teaches us warns us about the word never. Where do we turn when we neglect our relationship with our Lord? Repent from your sins of despising God's word, rejecting his love and making yourself worthy of his judgment and rejoice in Jesus' forgiving love for you. Amen.