



Sermon

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I see many parents this time of year expressing frustration that their children are not listening and seem to be defiant. They tell me, "I give my child this or that thinking they would appreciate it and what do they do? Shrug it off, demand more, and then disrespect me. It's never enough, and they are never happy." Looking at our gospel passage: I cannot help but think what God must have thought about Israel. I give them the Promised Land and what have they done? They disrespect Me. They always want more; they are never happy. Must be this time of year!

Our Gospel passage this morning is unique to the ACNA. Our old lectionary reading was John 12:1-8 where Jesus has His feet anointed and declares you will always have the poor with you. Why did ACNA change, aside from making it harder to prepare for Sunday? The John 12 passage emphasized how Jesus was anointed before His death, how that this world is still going to have strife and struggles in it, but that should not distract us from our task of anointing Christ daily in our heart. With this fantastic message, what makes this passage more appropriate for the Fifth Sunday of Lent? Plenty.

Our Gospel parable is the clearest and most explicit of Jesus' prophetic denunciation of Israel as wicked tenants. It describes how they will kill Jesus, and because of their rejection and hard hearts, they will be cast out, replaced by new tenants, the Gentiles. Ouch. How would children like to hear that they will be kicked out of their house and be replaced by other children because they listen better?

The image of being tenant farmers has a great richness that goes back to Adam. Adam was put in the Garden of Eden to till the soil and to keep the garden. When Israel entered the Promised Land, they were called to bear spiritual fruit. They were to bear witness to the Nations and to teach them to live God's law. The very image of the Promised Land is echoed in this parable by the use of the vineyard. Look in Numbers 13:23-27 and you will read where they came to the valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a single cluster of grapes. The word *Eshcol* means "cluster." The land that God will give is filled with milk and honey. Thus a "cluster" of grapes, as well as a vineyard, represents the Promised Land. Bearing fruit in this Promised Land is to be spiritual.

However, the owner in our parable, God, does not see any fruit, so He sends servants, which are the prophets. Instead of heeding their voice, they mocked and ridiculed them. We notice that in Matthew's version, they, too, are killed. This is not so in Luke. This is to emphasize the importance of Christ's death, the only one that has effectiveness. It is also interesting to note the tense change. The father will send his son. Then, Luke switches back to the prophetic language that it has already happened meaning that the killing of God's son, has yet to happen, though it has previously been ordained. Jesus tells this parable one day before He entered Jerusalem. Being that He identified Himself as the Son and that Israel will be destroyed because they would not listen, He became Enemy Number One. Right, the reason for killing Jesus was the fear that Jesus' words will have Rome come and destroy them. The Israelites want to keep their land at all costs. Caiaphas, as a boy, saw the destructive power of Rome and did not what to see it again.

Jesus is telling them because you did not listen to Me, you will be destroyed, and it will be from God at the hand of whomever He chooses. He will then put new tenants into the Promised Land. That is, the gentiles; that is, Christians. That is US!

After the parable, Jesus then quotes Psalm 118:22 followed by Isaiah 8. It is interesting that people sang this very psalm 118:26 when He enters Jerusalem on the donkey, which we will pray next week. This passage is excellent about the blessings of the cornerstone. However, Jesus followed up by quoting Isaiah 8:15 of what happens to those who stumble on the cornerstone. We now see the importance of this passage to be proclaimed the day before Palm Sunday and why ANCA made the switch in our readings, but what does this mean for us?

The last several weeks we have heard the plea, *May our repentance bear fruit*. This passage asks us to reflect within ourselves. Do we reject God's will to ensure our earthly gain? We see a distinct pattern of God's people being bad tenants. First Adam, then the Israelites, but how about us? This passage calls us to reflect on the times we have stumbled on the cornerstone and to repent, that it may indeed be the cornerstone that is key in our life. Let the cornerstone be the one from Psalms, not Isaiah. After all, we don't want God saying, "Oh you children of mine, I gave you My very son, and you don't appreciate this gift, you disrespect Me and want more. Hmm, maybe I will find another child." May your repentance bear fruit. AMEN!

Fr. Jeff+