



## **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost October 4, 2020**

### **Introduction**

*In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells a vineyard parable, which serves as an image of Israel, the prophets' mission, and Christ's death. For Christians, the vineyard also speaks of God's love poured out in the blood of Christ, given to us for the forgiveness of sin. Grafted onto Christ the vine at baptism, so that we may share Christ's sufferings and know the power of his resurrection.*

### **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity one God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,  
whose steadfast love is everlasting,  
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,  
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

**We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts.**

**We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.**

**We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.**

**We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us.**

**We sin in thought, word, and deed.**

**By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us;  
and in your Spirit, lead us;**

**so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.**

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,

through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

### **Gathering Hymn**

### ***How Firm a Foundation***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## **Prayer of the Day**

Beloved God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## **Psalmody: Psalm 80:7-15**

<sup>7</sup>Restore us, O God of hosts;

let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

<sup>8</sup>**You have brought a vine out of Egypt;**

**you cast out the nations and planted it.**

<sup>9</sup>You cleared the ground for it; it took root and filled the land.

<sup>10</sup>**The mountains were covered by its shadow  
and the towering cedar trees by its boughs.**

<sup>11</sup>You stretched out its tendrils to the sea and its branches to the river.

<sup>12</sup>**Why have you broken down its wall,  
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?**

<sup>13</sup>The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it,  
and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.

<sup>14</sup>**Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;**

<sup>15</sup>behold and tend this vine; preserve what your right hand has planted.

## **Second Reading: Philippians 3:4b-14**

*Paul reviews some of his supposed credentials, which no longer have any bearing in comparison to the right relationship he has been given through the death of Christ. The power of Christ's resurrection motivates him to press on toward the ultimate goal, eternal life with Christ.*

*Read the text [here](#).*

## **Gospel: Matthew 21:33-46**

*Jesus tells a parable to the religious leaders who are plotting his death, revealing that their plans will, ironically, bring about the fulfillment of scripture.*

*Read the text [here](#).*

## Reflection on the Text

Here in the US, we hear a lot about building ourselves up. If we are poor, we need to “pull ourselves up by the bootstraps.” If we don’t have something, go out and get it. Work for it. Sometimes, folks will steal, lie, cheat, or misdirect things in order to get what they don’t have and can’t afford. There are others who are born into the right family or right situation to have a life of luxury. In either case, success can be seen as having what you want. I can almost hear the saying, “the person who dies with the most toys wins.”

That sense of seeing value in ourselves through the lens of money, goods, status has been around for a long time. Is that view the best one to have? Is it the system of value that should be used? Is there another system of value out there?

That is where Paul enters the scene. In Philippians, Paul talks about his life prior to becoming a Christian. Paul was a devout Jew, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. A Pharisee. Circumcised on the eighth day. Even though he was born outside of Judea, Paul learned Hebrew and the law from a known expert of the time. Due to lineage, obedience to all of the laws, having the best education that was possible, Paul had an elite status.

Paul had been born into a terrific station in life and he even worked himself into a more elevated spot. Paul had pulled himself up “by the bootstraps” from a good spot to an even better spot. Paul had earned, or merited, his position in life. By worldly standards, Paul was a success.

As I mentioned earlier, Paul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a small group of Jews who tried to keep not only the Law of Moses but also tried to keep all of the oral laws. The oral laws were the written interpretations of Hebrew scripture by the Scribes. Paul even excelled at that. His zeal led Paul to live the law to the letter, even the *yod*. A *yod* is a Hebrew letter a little bigger than an apostrophe. In his zeal, Paul intended to keep the Jewish faith pure by arresting and charging Christians. In all of this, Paul was considered righteous. He thought that he was doing all the right things to please God - to merit a closer relationship with God.

Is a merit-based system the best way to find value? Is it the best way to be successful and connect with God? Can Paul earn his way to God? Can we earn our way to God? Can any of us be good enough to be considered righteous?

Well...Paul discovered that it wasn't. As we know from Acts, Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus. That meeting changed Paul's perspective. Paul discovered that without Christ, he will never be good enough to be considered righteous. Neither will we. We will not be judged as acceptable, because we all sin. Any merit-based righteousness that we attempt is nothing but self-righteousness.

God must be the one to initiate the righteousness process. God does this through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Christ connects us with God.

The meeting between the resurrected Christ and Paul on the road to Damascus started the process for Paul. Faith in Christ and a new view of God starts here for Paul.

This faith is a gift from God. Christ offered this faith to Paul. Christ offers it to all of us. Faith in the living God that loves us. This faith is more than just knowing Christ in an intellectual way. This a desire to know Christ in our hearts, minds, and souls. It is a life-changing event. Faith in the Triune God causes us to want to know more about God. This faith causes us to be transformed from our old selves to the selves that God wants us to be. The transformation influences how we think, feel, and behave.

As Paul writes of his old life without Christ, it is worthless. No better than a cow patty in the field. Our own lives WITHOUT the Holy Spirit leading us to Christ who reconnects us with the Father, is just as worthless. It is no more than trash to be discarded. Christ shows us how to love God and love one another. Christ brings us to God to live a life that is valued by faith in God and from God, service to each other, and redemption through Christ.

This transformation that God creates in our lives isn't just a one-time event. It is a life-long event. We all grow in faith and knowledge as we walk with God in our lives. Trust in God to shape us into what God wants us to be. Rejoice that God loves us enough to give us the gift of faith. Have faith that God will be faithful to us, even when we make mistakes. Go in peace. Amen

## **Hymn of the Day**

## ***If You But Trust in God to Guide You***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## **Apostles' Creed**

*We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.**

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

## **Prayers of Intercession**

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

*A brief silence.*

Holy God, you call us to work for peace and justice in your vineyard. Refresh the church with your life, that we may bear fruit through work and service. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you for the abundant harvest of the earth. Bless and care for those whose hands bring the fruits of the earth to the tables of all who hunger. May we be inspired by your servants who cared deeply for your creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Curb the impulses of greed and pride that lead us to take advantage of others. Grant that world leaders seek the fruits of the kingdom for the good and welfare of all people. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sustain all who suffer with the promise of new life. Assured of your presence, heal our pain and suffering, and equip us to embrace all bodies aching for wholeness of mind, body, and soul. We call to mind those who are struggling today especially those we name now. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all managers in our community and for all who seek employment. Give hope and a future to those who lack meaningful work, those who have been marginalized or abused in the workplace, and those who desire new opportunities. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Thank you for the saints who teach us to live faithfully in your vineyard. May our chorus join theirs until our labor is complete. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **Lord's Prayer**

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Closing Hymn**

***The Church of Christ, in Every Age***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Mike Lang.