

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 21:33-44

"Good News and Bad News"

When we get to today's Holy Gospel, the clock is ticking for Jesus – as today's Holy Gospel brings us to the very last week of Jesus' earthly life. Last week Jesus told us of the parable of the two sons and the previous week we heard a parable of the workers in the vineyard. Jesus gives us this parable about the wicked tenants – which is also recorded in the Gospels of Luke and Mark. This is so important for us to hear because in the timeline of Jesus' life – Palm Sunday has just happened – and this parable give us insight into God's plan for His people – and those who reject Him. Just days before this – people were waving palm branches and laying cloaks on the road and saying hosanna, hosanna to the highest – blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. And what happened just days later – this parable comes true.

The timing of our readings is perfectly intertwined – as our first reading is really God setting the groundwork through the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 5:1-7. It is all about the vineyard and what Jesus is talking about. In the words of the Prophet – God is speaking of the Promised Land - the Vineyard – and how this 'vineyard' had yielded the bad grapes of rejecting Him. Israel was supposed to be producing the fruit of righteousness, and then showing God's grace to the world that surrounded them – if not the entire world. But Israel in its own self-centered way was insisting on keeping the grace all for itself, practicing injustice in its own life, and seeking to repel and resist the world around them by whatever violent means might be necessary. Israel rejected the way of peace, and is about to reject its final messenger. But the story does not stop there. The vineyard owner will return at last, and, when He does, the judgment that Israel longed to see meted out on the pagan nations will instead be sentenced upon her. He will destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others – the Gentiles. It goes without saying that upon hearing Jesus' parable, no first-century Jew would have needed to be told that the owner was a representation for Almighty God, the farmers for Israel, and the messengers for God's holy prophets. The landowner, having no one left to send, sent his own beloved son. This Son came as the rightful heir, the King to His Father's tenants; and they were standing in His way, determined to keep the vineyard for themselves. Eventually they threw him out and killed him.

Jesus reminded the people that God had been very good to them, as a people, having delivered them from Egypt and planted them in a rich and prosperous land. God gave them so much, and all He asked was that they bear fruit for His glory. God had sent His servants - the prophets, to the people to receive that fruit. But the people mistreated those servants, and even killed some of them. As Jesus spoke this to the people – they had to have made some connection with the parable and the Scriptures, especially Isaiah – BUT – they had no way of knowing what was going to happen in the next few days. Jesus had told His disciples and Apostles many times that He must suffer and die. Here's just one example from Luke chapter nine, verse 22: *"And he said, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.'"* It just went over their heads!

Throughout the history of Israel, the rejection of God's Word and Prophets had cost them dearly; it cost them the first Temple – and the complete destruction of Jerusalem, sent into exile in Babylon for 70 years. Like the tenants of the Vineyard – they had their own agenda and were disobedient not only to God's Law, but to His Word and demands for repentance.

Jesus is telling the people what is happening right before their eyes – that He is being rejected by those He came to save, but that He is destined to be vindicated by God the Father. This is a parable full of depth, sorrow and power, telling how Jesus has now come to Jerusalem to confront the tenant farmers with God's demand for the fruit of their repentance, for Israel to step up and be what it was called to be, the light of God's world. We know that Israel, through the Temple leadership, is going to refuse that demand, and will end up by killing Jesus – the vineyard Owner's own Son – in a few days.

"Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" "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. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."" (Matthew 21:42-44)

Here is where it gets very interesting, in doing my study, I found that the Hebrew word for "son" is "ben." I had always thought that the Hebrew word for son was 'bar' – Simon Bar Jonah and so on, but that is Aramaic. I stand corrected – the Hebrew word for son is 'ben' as in Ben Hur. The Hebrew word for stone is "eben." There is definitely a correlation here. When we hear Jesus's teaching to these people just a few days before His sacrifice, He is speaking of the "ben" who is also the "eben." The Son is also the stone!

When a building goes up – this special stone is put on top of the corner to hold it all together. He is saying that He is the means of repentance and judgment and that rejecting God's beloved Son by failing to submit your life to Him has serious consequences. In 2014, Marilyn and I led a trip to Israel, and we were very blessed as we went to some ruins – Chorazin as a matter of fact. There was a synagogue in Chorazin that had part of it still standing, and one of the pieces that they showed was the cornerstone. It was kind of interesting because on the cornerstone was the engraving of a fish and we found that very telling to us. We got a view of what a cornerstone looked like, and that was the capstone that kept the corner of the building together.

The Apostle Peter later referred to this in his first epistle *"For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, and a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-which is also what they were destined for."* (1 Peter 2:6-8) There is a song called Cornerstone, that says "I lay in Zion, a foundation of stone, a precious cornerstone." That song kept going

through my head the whole time. Wow – the truth is that those who aren't broken before Him will one day be broken by Him. The Apostle Paul wrote this truth to the Philippians, "*Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.*" (Philippians 2:10) Did you hear in today's second reading from Paul to the Philippians "*For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.*" (Philippians 3:18-20) I am not just preaching this – this is the truth! This is the Word of God, the Word of Jesus and then spoken by Peter, and then also by Paul. The only question that remains here - is when will your life be broken by God's precious chosen corner stone?

- Will you give your life to Him?
- Have you given your life to Him - now to be broken before Him in repentance and be saved? That does not mean that you will be crumbling and broken, but inside broken and then made a new creation!
- Or will you be like those who wait too long and will be broken or crushed by Him when He returns to judge the world?

Believing in Jesus is the key. All you need to do to be saved is to believe in Jesus Christ! I have said many times from this pulpit – and you have heard me – sharing with you the words from John 3:16-18. In just a few moments I will stand before you and reminding you of the 'comfortable words' but I want to remind you of the whole message from Jesus – with no omission, "*For God so love the world that He send His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*" (John 3:16-18)

My friends, the good news is this:

- if you believe in Jesus, and give yourself to Him, you will be broken – but strengthened as a new creation.
- The bad news is - if you do not believe in Him and stand against Him – well when that stone falls – you had better watch out!