

***"The Rejected One"***

In today's Holy Gospel Jesus tells the people the parable of the vineyard owner who has sent messengers to his tenant farmers, but really to no effect. No first-century Jew would have needed to be told that the owner represented God, the farmers were Israel, and the messengers for God's prophets. This landowner, had no one left to send, so he sent his own beloved son. This son was the rightful heir of the King; and the farmers were standing in his way, determined to keep the vineyard for themselves. They threw him out and killed him. Sound familiar?

I think you will agree with me, the meaning of the story seems pretty obvious – and fits with the rest of Luke's Gospel so far. Jesus is of course the rightful Heir, and has come to complete the work of God's ancient prophets, challenging the people of Israel one more time to give to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - the honor and obedience that He deserves. Israel was supposed to be producing the fruit of righteousness, and then showing God's grace to the world around them – and really, to the entire world. But Israel was self-centered and insisting on keeping the grace all for itself, practicing injustice in its own life, and repelling, and resisting the world around them by whatever violent means might be necessary. Israel rejected the way of peace, and is about to reject the final messenger. The story doesn't stop there, because the vineyard owner will return at last, and, when He does, the judgment that Israel longed to see meted out on the pagan world will be sentenced instead upon them. He will destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others – the Gentiles.

The leadership in Jerusalem, and the Temple's self-appointed guardians of Israel's laws and tradition, are really signing their own death warrants! Their rejection of Jesus will be taken up by God into the rebuilding plans for His people: "*The stone the builders rejected,*" in this case the Messiah sent to Israel who they rejected, "*has become the capstone.*" These words from Psalm 118:22 use a very different image from that of the vineyard. Ironically and this should be an "aha moment" that the very same psalm is echoed by the crowds in Luke 19:38 as Jesus rode on the back of the colt into the city when they said, "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!*" There should be no irony here – remember, God really knows what He is doing, long before we do. Jesus' reference to the capstone or cornerstone should remind the people of the construction of the temple under Solomon's reign when the massive stones were chiseled miles away from the building site in order that no sound would be heard upon the temple mount. When the stones arrived, if one stone didn't fit it was thrown down the hill into the Kidron Valley. When it became evident that the cornerstone was missing, the stone that had been rejected turned out to be the one that fit perfectly. Jesus applies this to Himself. In effect, HE is saying, "You're trying to build your salvation without Me, but you're going to see that I am the Cornerstone. Without Me, nothing stands." Jesus is the stone which does not fit the preconceived notion of the Messiah. He is not coming in riding on a white horse with a sword up in the air. No, He is peaceful; He comes meek and mild, preaching peace. His resurrection from the dead proves that He is the One on whom all eternity is built. Though the leaders of the

Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 3, 2022, Year C

political world and the religious world may reject Jesus, God has made Him the centerpiece of His plan. Though people, even all people, reject Him and refuse to build their life upon Him and His Word, there is no replacement of or for God's precious and chosen Corner Stone. Jesus' quoting this verse at this point absolutely rams His message home. The workers may reject Jesus now, but they will find very very soon that He will be vindicated. Soon He will be seen as the true Messiah. He will build the true Temple, and He Himself will be its chief feature, the standard by which everything and everyone else is to be judged. I keep thinking to myself, when Jesus comes again, how many people will look up as He comes, and fall to their knees, and say "now I see you Jesus, please forgive me." I just can't help but think that and I pray that those of us will be ready beforehand and we will just be singing, hosanna, and blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord, as He appears on the clouds in great glory with His angels. I am afraid that it very well may mean rejection and violence and the history of Christian martyrdom and persecution will stand to be a glaring witness to that.

But the good news is that the vineyard owner will have the last word. What happened to Jesus was the decisive victory. Ever since then, His followers have gone on their mission, to declare, by their life, their words, and their actions - that His church has already triumphed in Jesus, that the renewed vineyard is bearing fruit, that the new Temple is being built, with its cornerstone already in place – Christ Himself.

Verse 15 and 16 of today's Gospel reveal the ultimate result of the callousness and hardness of the man's heart against the rule of God. "*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!"*" The rejection of the message and the messengers is harsher each time. Ultimately, instead of remorse and repenting, they do the exact opposite. Those rebellious tenants killed the beloved Son, a glimpse and foreshadowing of the fate that awaits Jesus in Jerusalem. The son is killed outside the vineyard or camp evidenced by the author of Hebrews: (Hebrews 13:12-13) God's Son, Jesus was killed on the cross at Golgotha, which was outside the city gates. "*And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.*" My friends, that is what Lent is all about! Preparing.

God used the image of a vineyard numerous times through the words of the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. These people understood the implication and were stunned at the word of final punishment on the tenants, feeling that they too will fall with the nation as God turns over the vineyard to Gentiles. The Holy Gospel says that they wanted to kill Jesus right then, but they were afraid of the reaction of the people.

Jesus' prophetic words were another opportunity, for the Jewish leaders to repent and to turn back to God. He was pleading with them to turn to God in truth and save not only their own lives, but the life of the whole nation of Israel. So what was their answer? They responded with a tragically unrepentant, "*May this never be!*" (Luke 20:16) The crowd's strong negative

Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 3, 2022, Year C

response indicates that they understood what Jesus was saying: the Jewish system was being set aside because the religious leaders were rejecting Him and the people, like lemmings, were following their leadership instead of God's. This parable sums up all of Jesus' messages concerning the fact that Gentiles and outcasts, the tax collectors, and sinners – as they repented - would be added to the kingdom because Israel would not recognize and submit to Jesus and His authority.

Verse 18 says that those who will not fall upon this stone in brokenness of repentance will have that stone fall upon them in judgment. *“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”* The Capstone or Cornerstone is a tremendous image that Jesus is saying that He is the means of repentance and judgment. Rejecting God's beloved Son by failing to cast your life upon Him has serious consequences. All you have to do is read John 3:16-18. Those who believe are saved, those who do not believe are condemned already! The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.”* (Philippians 2:10) The only question is when will your life be broken by God's precious chosen corner stone? Will you cast your life upon Him NOW to be broken before Him in repentance and be saved? Or will you wait too long and be broken or crushed BY Him when He returns to judge the world? Again that vision of Jesus coming back with His holy angels and how many people, including man Jews, falling on their faces, and saying, “it is Jesus!” How they wished they had accepted Him beforehand.

The Apostle Peter wrote is 1 Peter 2:6, *“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”*. Today we have all sorts of people, all kinds of experts, giving advice. Somebody has something to say about everything! Sometimes it runs in circles. Just turn on the TV or radio and there is a subject matter expert giving advice on just about everything. But the only true and trustworthy expert is Jesus Christ. He gives us the absolute certain truth which is recorded for us written in Holy Scripture. If we repent and fall upon Christ as the new cornerstone of our life, our life will be broken in pieces, but by trusting in Him and living for Him we can rebuild it upon the chosen cornerstone of eternal existence. If we fall upon Jesus and build our life upon Him, we will never, ever be put to shame. My brothers and sisters in Christ - it's never too early to begin to build a life based and built upon this cornerstone, the solid foundation – Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ.

I love Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 7, when He told His disciples that there were two men – one man built his house upon the sand, and the wind blew and the storms came. What happened to that house? It was washed away! The other man build his house upon the solid rock – and when the winds came, and the storms came – it stood! That is the foundation – the rock, on which we build our faith – Jesus Christ the righteous! Let Satan gives us his best shot – but Christ stands with us, and we will stand with Him for all eternity. Jesus, the One who was rejected, we choose to be our Cornerstone!