



Pentecost 19 (A)
October 4th, 2026

RCL: Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Psalm 19; Philippians 3:4b-14; **Matthew 21:33-46**

Opening Prayer |

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Context |

The setup of the parable in Matthew 21:33-46 creates certain expectations in its listeners (and us, its readers): The tenants are greedy and heartless misers, the son has made a great sacrifice of love and duty to his father, and the landowner will surely strike down the tenants who so heartlessly killed his slaves—and son. And one final interpretive framing: the landowner's authority and portion of the harvest are evidently worth all this bloodshed.

Read in its scriptural context—this story falls right in the middle of Matthew's judgment parables—this parable can be taken as a warning to the chief priests and elders to whom Jesus addresses it: that they will no longer be entrusted with the vineyard if they cannot produce its yield in due time. Matthew's version of the parable draws heavily on Israel's prophetic tradition, particularly the vineyard imagery of Isaiah 5, in which the vineyard represents God's people.

Read against the historical context of the primarily Jewish community for whom Matthew writes, a community living in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple, the parable can also be heard as Matthew's attempt to wrestle with questions of rejection, authority, and the fruits God desires from those entrusted with God's gifts. It should not, however, be read as a judgment sentence on the Jewish faith or as an exclusion of Jews from the Kingdom. Rather, Matthew uses the language of Israel's own scriptures and prophetic tradition to wrestle with his community's experience of rejection and exclusion, and to proclaim that God's gifts cannot be claimed as private property by those entrusted with them.

This is a complicated parable as we read it in our own time: What kind of harvest has the vineyard produced? Are there even enough fruits and wine to share? If so—why would the tenants refuse to share? And if not, why would they kill to conceal this fact? Are the grapes too small, or too sour? Why would the son—after seeing the way the slaves have been treated—agree to go to such a violent place? And, maybe most importantly: what market would there ever be for grapes so watered by blood?

The opening lines of the parable show us how the vineyard is carefully created, but the hearts of the tenants entrusted with it have not been cultivated in the same way. What happens when those entrusted with God's gifts begin to believe those gifts belong to them? What recourse when they begin to protect its yield as their rightful share—even at the cost of lives lost?

Theological Reflection |

There is a strange economy at work in this parable. The vineyard has been carefully prepared: The landowner has planted vines, built a fence, dug the wine press, and constructed a watchtower. Everything necessary for a fruitful harvest is in place. And yet the people entrusted with the vineyard begin to believe that the harvest belongs to them. When the slaves arrive to collect what is owed to the landlord, they are beaten, stoned, or killed. When the landowner sends his beloved son, the tenants kill him, too. The fruit of the vineyard becomes inseparable from the blood spilled to possess it.

In what world is there a market for grapes watered by the blood of slaves, nourished by the blood of a beloved child?

The answer, perhaps uncomfortably, is that we know this world only too well. We don't have to look far to find economies in which abundance is built upon the suffering of others; systems in which people can become expendable when their lives pay the price for greater profit. It can be difficult to acknowledge how we participate in economies of domination, even when we do not mean to. Such an economy is nourished by the blood of those whose lives have been deemed expendable. This parable challenges us to ask not simply whether we are like the tenants, but whether we have learned to live in the same kind of economy.

Often children on a playground broker a different kind of economy. With the exception of occasional squabbles, a norm for sharing pervades. As soon as children meet, whatever toys they have brought are immediately swapped: a shovel exchanged for a bucket, a scooter in trade for a bike. On days when a child brings nothing, extra pull toys or balls are shared, and rarely is there screaming or throwing. Each gift is held as precious—a perfectly functioning bubble wand may be exchanged for another child's cracked, plastic takeout container, simply because to-go boxes make better boats. What would happen to us all if this economy were the norm—no offering too small or shabby, with joy coming from the exchange as much as from the actual use?

The answer to that question may be found in the stone the builders rejected. Jesus takes an image of rejection and turns it into an image of foundation: the stone cast aside becomes the cornerstone. The people and things the world considers expendable are not expendable to God. What the world overlooks, God may make foundational. What the world calls too small, too poor, too broken, too strange, or too insignificant may become the very thing upon which God's kingdom is built—and upon which the powers and principalities break.

This is the economy of grace: an economy in which no gift is too small to share, no person is too insignificant to belong, and abundance does not require someone to become expendable. When we cling too tightly to what we have received, when we choose to harden our hearts to the needs of those around us, a part of us does die. We break ourselves to pieces on the stones of our own hearts. But conversely, when we ask for a shovel, swap a scooter, or give a ball; when we share our cracked to-go boxes, our empty hands, our weary hearts, we come so much more alive. Nothing is lost simply because it is shared. Somehow, through the exchange, everyone leaves richer.

At the center of this economy of grace is Christ himself: the one who does not seize, but gives; who does not make others expendable, but offers himself so that others may live. The blood of Christ does not nourish an economy in which someone must die so that another may profit. It is freely offered, not as payment for our participation in domination, but as the source of our courage to resist it. At Christ's table, we are invited into a different kind of exchange, where we bring our remorse, our joy, our anger, and our grief, and receive in exchange the gift of belonging. There is always room at this table, and Christ turns no one away.

The question, then, is not just about what we have been given, but what kind of economy our lives create with the grace we have received. Do we hold our gifts tightly, believing that there will never be enough? Or can we trust the strange abundance of grace: that when we share the harvest—no matter how small—there will somehow be more joy, more life, and more room for everyone?

Reflection Questions |

- What does the vineyard parable reveal about the difference between possessing a gift and being entrusted with it?
- When have you experienced abundance that came through sharing rather than possessing?
- What is something you have that seems too small, ordinary, or imperfect to offer? Where might you offer it anyway?
- Who in your community gets treated as expendable, overlooked, or insignificant? How might you make room for them?

Faith in Practice |

Practice an intentional exchange this week. Give something away—not necessarily because you no longer want it, but because someone else might find joy or use in it. You might host a meal, a clothing swap, donate a book to a Little Free Library, give away a toy, or offer your time, your expertise, or an hour of your attention to someone. If possible, receive something from another person in return, even if what they offer seems small or ordinary. Take some intentional time at the end of the week to reflect on the exchange. What did you give? What did you receive? Where did you notice abundance? Offer a prayer of gratitude, asking God to help you remember what has been entrusted to you and to build in you the trust that there is enough to share.

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