



Twenty-seventh Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

Isaiah 5:1-7 Philippians 4:6-9 Matthew 21:33-43

It's spring and we have another farming story. The farmer in our story is called a householder. He is the owner of a small block, which he hopes will become a flourishing vineyard.

He plants vines, plants a shelter belt which will also keep out wandering stock and builds a wine press. Because he also has a business in the city he employs tenants and then goes off on an overseas trip.

Matthew identifies the householder as God. This story conforms to the biblical message that all land belongs to God. God has invested in the work of others. God provides the capital but we tenants have to produce the fruit. It seems an ideal situation. The tenants are left free to develop their own gifts and their own creativity.

In the story the owner naturally wants to know how things are going. He also wants his share. Now comes the puzzling part- he sends his agents to check up on the tenants. These are abused and chased off. The owner tries again, the same thing happens.

By this time the listeners are feeling a little uncomfortable. The locale for the story was the temple where religious people gathered. They were asking themselves, "Who is he talking about?"

The story continued. The owner, now disturbed by what is happening tries again. He decides to send his son believing that the tenants will respect the heir. The worst happens and the son is killed. The wrath of the owner is great.

Jesus poses the question, "What will happen?"

The listeners respond with the most likely answer for the times.

Has this parable anything to say to us?

The reading from Isaiah is called the Vineyard Song. It is very poignant. It is a reproach on those who are cherished but give nothing of themselves.

The Scriptures are full of stories of God's goodness to humankind. There are also stories of human response which is selfish, heedless, arrogant and lacking in compassion.

As holders of the vision of God we have an awesome responsibility towards people and towards the earth. We see the fruits of a lack of concern all around us. We watch at politicians put short term profit before the sufferings of people. I was told only

yesterday of children with high levels of lead in their systems from mining contamination. The pollution of the most valuable resource, water, goes on daily.

Wringing our hands or saying, "Someone should do something." are not suitable responses from God's stewards. The slogan, *Think globally, act locally* is a good place to start. We need to discern what contribution we can make. We have differing gifts. Some join organisations like Greenpeace, Amnesty International or Aid groups. Others volunteer for clean-up projects, monitoring wildlife, or fund raising, still others lobby councils and politicians.

We should not let denominational or religious difference confine our efforts. Check out the neighbourhood. There are probably groups with local or international outreach.

Paul in the Philippians warns against over anxiousness. He tells us God is on our side in this. Live according to what we have been taught. Peace will be our gift. In other words, do what you can, commend to God what is beyond your strength.

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