

- What were they thinking?
  - How did the tenant farmers ever get it into their heads that they had the right to keep the grapes and vineyards they did not own? How could they justify killing the owner's servants and then his son?
  - To understand this parable, we need to consider the situation back then. Very often farms and vineyards were owned by wealthy foreigners who lived a great distance away.
  - Jewish law read that if a landowner died without an heir, his property would become the possession of whoever grabbed it first. In this case, the workmen.
  - These tenant farmers want to take it all forgetting that a time will come, as Jesus told us before, that the owner will demand an accounting
- It's no mistake that Jesus often uses the vineyard as a symbol of the Kingdom of God. The parable today is actually the third in a line of three parables to be found in Matthew's Gospel which concern themselves with vineyards.
  - The first of this series was the story of the workers and the havoc caused at payday when the self-righteous wanted more.
    - Jesus hammered home that God's generosity to us calls us to be generous to others.
    - The very love and forgiveness we ask for from God, is precisely what we are called to share every day with others, to do so generously and w/o counting the cost.

- Then last week, Jesus gave us the two brothers called to work in the Father's vineyard.
  - One said, “Uh, no thanks. Too hard.” But eventually regretted his decision and went.
  - The other, perhaps even with the best of intentions, “Of course, I’ll go.” but then never quite made it. Perhaps he ran out of time. Perhaps he had other, important things, to do. Perhaps he was just paying lip-service. In any case he never made it.
  - Here Jesus reminds us not to overcomplicate things. We need to bear fruit both with our words and our actions. We can’t pray one thing to the Father and live another to our sisters and brothers.
  - For the psalmist, the vineyard was the House of Israel, the chosen people of God. For us, though, as Christ came to save all people, the vineyard is much broader.
  - Very simply, the vineyard is our home, office, school and playground. The vineyard is your life and mine. And the harvest is right now.
  - The vineyard is that moment of the day and the area immediately around us where God gives us opportunity after opportunity to bear fruit for others, to reach out and bring them the love Christ has given us.

- And now, episode 3 of our binge reading, and today's parable is the most direct.
  - Maintaining a vineyard is hard work: planting the seeds, pruning and harvesting the vines, pressing the grapes. But this hard work eventually leads to wonderful wine which brings joy to the heart.
  - It takes equally hard work to build up and then enter the Kingdom of God, making this parable an appropriate parallel for the hard work which ultimately leads to the unsurpassable joy of entering the Kingdom of Heaven.
  
- But if we're honest, I think the parallel doesn't stop there.
  - In many ways, we're like those tenant farmers, thinking that it's our hard work, for our family, for ourselves, for the good we contribute is, our hard work that brings about the harvest.
  - But we cannot make the mistake of the workers in the vineyard, of thinking that our bounty is only ours, that our efforts are the only thing that has produced the fruits we live on.
  - Oh, we may not be violent about it but it's tempting isn't it, to say: I've done it, I've earned it. I've worked hard for it and no one is going to tell me what to do. Sure, I'll share some of it but it's mine to with as I wish.
  - Certainly, it is important to recognize, celebrate and even reward hard work. But we cannot forget, cannot overlook the Owner of the vineyard.

- Remember the start of today's parable: the Owner *planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower.*
- The Owner set the stage for the workers. The OWNER planted the seeds. The OWNER put up hedge to keep the animals out. The OWNER built a watchtower to provide more security and place for the workers to stay.
- In the same way our heavenly Father sets the stage for us to do the work in the vineyard that bear fruit for us and provides for our families.
  - Our heavenly Father has given us life and the gifts, talents and abilities that make us worker.
  - Our heavenly Father, provides not a hedge to keep the animals at bay, but His Body and Blood, both here in the Eucharist and in the support of others.
  - Our heavenly Father looks to provide the consolation and safety of His presence
  - Ultimately, we need to recognize all that the Father has done to provide us the ability to do anything at all, especially the call to assist Him with our efforts for our own salvation AND that of our sisters and brothers.
- If not, then we are no better than those who tried to steal what was not rightfully theirs, to take what belongs to the landowner and squirrel it away for ourselves as if we could keep it forever.

- It's no accident, then, that Saint Paul gives us a different way of operating. Paul gives the alternative by recognizing and celebrating the presence of God in everything I do and in everyone I meet.
  - Paul's way of working in the vineyard is twofold. First comes prayer, to lay anxiety aside by putting our needs in the hands of our heavenly Father. Easier said than done but something to strive for and to move towards, even if it's only by inches.
  - Then comes the second part and what many today would consider radical. Saint Paul said "Look for the GOOD."
  - See in the other, in any challenge, in every argument, in every person I encounter, find and concentrate on the *honorable, the pure, the lovely, the graciousness, the excellence, what is worthy of praise.*
  - This is not merely putting blinders on; it's taking the time, making the effort to recognize in another, one who is a child of God because he or she was created in the image and likeness of God.
  - It is work to search out something in the other, no matter how disagreeable, a starting point for honest discussion, for respect.
  - It takes far more effort to work together with another in the vineyard, when that one thinks differently or challenges me.
  - But, in looking for good in the other, I recognize, even help to realize, the Owner of the vineyard who has created us both.
- This is not merely pie in the sky and this past week, we celebrated one who lived this second reading to the full: our patron: St Francis.

- Through prayer, Francis sought to put everything, even his own well-being, into the hands of the Father. Then he spent his time going around and proclaiming the Presence of God he saw in others, in nature, in all creation. Francis celebrated *the honorable, the pure, the lovely, the graciousness, the excellence, whatever is worthy of praise* in everything and everyone.
- And (in just a moment) we will call forth those who wish to do the same thing in our newly established Saint Teresa of Calcutta Conference of the Saint Vincent DePaul Society.
  - As we induct them and ask God’s blessing upon them, especially on those God has called to lead, they promise:
    - to adopt “a spirit of poverty, humility and sharing, which is nourished by prayer and reflection,”
    - “to affirm the dignity of each person by compassionate service to all who are poor and suffering”
    - to seek and to find the forgotten, the suffering the deprived to bring them the love of Jesus offering person-to-person service.
  - And they have already started, going out to some of the more challenged neighborhoods around us in Brunswick, helping, by their very presence to proclaim what is *honorable, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise* in the other, in the poor, the undocumented, those who don’t speak English.

- Jesus reminds us in today’s parable that we are called to help God build the kingdom, to help bear fruit for the Lord, to help lift the other by my efforts, to share the fruit of what I have been given by God.
  - Very simply, Jesus reminds us through Saint Paul: Keep on doing what we have learned and received and heard and seen from Him so that we can share even now in the peace of God.
  - Peace be with you