

“May IT Never Be !!!”

In our text for today, what we know as Holy Week has already begun. Jesus has entered into Jerusalem to the shouts of “hosanna” – immediately before our text, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders challenge the authority of Jesus.

So, as He often does – to teach both His detractors and His disciples – He tells a parable, our Gospel reading for today. As He comes to the conclusion of the parable – He asks this question.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to [those who treated his servants shamefully and killed his very own son]?” And He answers His own question – “He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

“When they heard this, they said, ‘Surely not!’”

“Surely not” sounds pretty weak to me – but their response is anything but weak. “May it never be!!!” is more literal. A strong rejection. The strongest way of saying NO in the Greek language. But that raises another question – what are they saying NO to? What are they saying shall never come to be?

“May it never be” that the owner of the vineyard should seek fruit from his vineyard? “May it never be” that the tenants should treat the owner’s servants and son shamefully? Or, “May it never be” that the vineyard be taken away from them and be given to others?

While Jesus tells this parable to “the people” – it is prompted by the religious authorities challenging His authority. And it is the “scribes and the chief priests” who “sought to lay hands on Him at that very hour, for they perceived that [Jesus] has told this parable against them ...”

They knew that “the vineyard” represented God’s people Israel – because this vineyard imagery is used often in the Old Testament. They knew that God the Father was the owner of the vineyard – that the servants the owner sent are the prophets.

But more than anything else – they understand what Jesus means when He says that God the Father will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. That is why they react so strongly --- “May IT never be!!!”

The people understand the warning of the parable – but the question running around in their heads might be – “Can God really do this, and will He?” Remember that this parable falls within the context of the authority of Jesus – with the religious leaders questioning His authority – with Jesus turning the tables on them – and the question is left hanging, unanswered.

So, can God do what this parable threatens, and will He? Obviously He can and He does. Because of Israel’s wickedness, unfaithfulness – because His chosen people will not repent and turn to Him in faith – the Owner of the vineyard does come and destroy the tenants, and gives the vineyard to others.

In the year 70 A.D. (less than 40 years after Jesus tells this parable) – the Lord, through the Romans, destroys Jerusalem and the temple. Israel has rejected the Lord and shamefully treated the prophets He has sent to them – even killing His very own Son, Jesus Christ – and the vineyard is given over to the Gentiles.

Israel was God’s chosen people through whom He promised to send the Savior so that all the world would be blessed. The Savior is for Israel – but Israel rejects the Lord, she wants the vineyard for herself. So the Gospel goes to the Gentiles – and now, as it has always been, the true Israel, the Lord’s vineyard – is all who bear the fruit of the vineyard – repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Dearly beloved, the Lord Jesus is telling this parable to you today – He’s warning you. And the knee-jerk reaction is the same as we heard in the text today – “May it never be!!!” But it is.

The Lord, the owner, desires the fruit of His vineyard. He sends His servants so that you, who live in His kingdom – would give Him the fruit of repentance and faith. But what do the tenants today do with His servants?

Some who preach repentance and bestow His gracious gifts are treated shamefully. There are pastors today who call God’s people to repent of cohabitation and sex outside of marriage – and they are sent packing, empty handed.

They are cast out – told to resign or they will be fired – salaries cut to starve them out – treated shamefully.

“May it never be!!” you say? Be careful – for the Lord comes to you, seeking the fruit of His kingdom.

Do you treat His Word shamefully when He reveals your sin of not coming to church – of despising His Word and rejecting the grace He give in His sacraments – not giving the fruit that belongs to Him?

Do you ignore His messengers and His message that they bring – saying it doesn’t apply to me – giving yourself a loophole? This too is happening in our day, in God’s vineyard. And when God threatens to come and destroy and take the vineyard away – rather than repent – do you stubbornly declare, “May it never be!!!”?

Dearly beloved, the Lord is calling you to repent – to repent of despising His Word and Sacraments, making other things a higher priority – to repent of making allowance for your sexual immorality, for your biting and lying words, for your greed and covetousness, for all your sin.

Unless you repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all your sin – it will be taken away from you, and you will be destroyed.

Dearly beloved, remember where this all starts – not just with the Son of God coming into the world to save sinners – but Jesus entering into Jerusalem, to suffer, to be crucified, to be put to death – to shed His blood to atone for your sin – that you may be reconciled to God your heavenly Father.

The Father’s desire is not to destroy you – but to save you. He desires to have mercy on sinners – but sinners who refuse to acknowledge their sin, sinners who reject the Lord and His Word – will not receive mercy, but destruction.

As the Lord comes to you now, seeking the fruit of His vineyard – come and bow before Him in humble repentance. Give your “amen” to His absolution. Eat the fruit of His suffering and death “for you” – His very body and blood – His mercy poured out on you, the tenants – more than that – the beloved children of His vineyard. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.