

“Tunnel Vision”

Have you ever been accused of having “tunnel vision” – fixating so much on the goal at hand that everything else is blocked out? I know I’m guilty of that from time to time. Here in this parable of Jesus – there is some of that going on.

This parable of the vineyard has its origins in these words from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who writes: “I will sing for the One I love a song about His vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then He looked for a crop of good grapes; but it yielded only bad fruit.” (Is. 5:1-2)

God the Father plants the vineyard, which is His people. In His “tunnel vision” of love for His people – the Father provides all that is needed – so that His vineyard might bear the good fruit of repentance and faith.

Yet, in the parable which Jesus tells – there is another kind of “tunnel vision” – one that has nothing to do with receiving and living according to the mercy and gifts of the owner of the vineyard.

The tenants are intent on taking. They take ownership of the land they did not till – of the vines they did not plant – the bounty of the harvest for which they did not work. When the owner sends His delegates – the tenants beat, abuse, and throw them out of the land that isn’t even theirs.

Hoping they will respect the Son, the Owner sends Him. But in their greed and “tunnel vision” to acquire legally what they have already possessed by force and cunning – they seize the Son, throw Him out of the vineyard, and murder Him.

On the surface we understand the intent and meaning of the parable – but as we hear at the end – it is the scribes and chief priests who are the subject of this parable.

Throughout the history of Israel, God sent to His vineyard prophets and priests to speak on His behalf – to preach repentance, and the bounty of His gracious forgiveness and life everlasting – but they would not listen, and yield the fruit of faith.

“What shall I do? I will send my beloved Son; perhaps they will respect Him” – perhaps Israel will listen to God Himself who comes in the flesh, into His vineyard. But they are fixated on taking, not receiving. They take Jesus, throw Him out of the vineyard, and kill Him.

Whether you are a farmer who owns land and rents it out, or not – you can imagine what it would be like – to have renters who abuse the relationship. You hear that they are not utilizing the land the way you have faithfully done for years. Weeds are not sprayed – fence lines are not repaired – cattle running loose.

And then you hear the report that – “its not my land, why should I care? Besides, we’re being overcharged!” What would you do? Would you send your hired hand? And if he came back all black and blue – would you send another?

Would you even consider sending your own flesh and blood? Would you send your only son – the one who is the inheritor of everything you have and have worked for? Would you send your son whom you love to these abusive and thieving tenants? IF you did, your neighbors would be wondering “what is he thinking?”

You don’t have to be a farmer to appreciate the parable of the vineyard. Many Christians, like these tenants, believe that God owes them a living. They fall into the temptation of believing that because of their position in the church, or their years of faithful service, they have certain perks coming to them.

Like the tenants who took as their possession that which was loaned to them for their stewardship – without respect for the Owner – many Christians believe that they can take as a right what is given to them as a gift.

“I can do whatever I please” – with little or no respect to what pleases the Giver. Whether I live a baptismal life of daily contrition and repentance, or not, that’s up to me. Whether I come to the Supper, or not, is my decision. “After all, God gave these gifts to me, and I can use them at my discretion.” Tunnel vision.

I suspect that anyone of us who had such disrespectful tenants would immediately call the sheriff – have them thrown off the land and into prison for assault and battery, willful neglect and destruction of property – and any other charges that would be applicable.

But God the Father doesn't do this to us, even though we are just as deserving of such punishment. The answer to the question, "What is God thinking?" – is – "He is thinking about your salvation." You see, God also has "tunnel vision."

God the Father is so intent on saving you that He would gladly and willingly risk the life of His own "flesh and blood" – His own Son, Jesus Christ. Nothing else matters to God than saving you.

This is not an act of desperation – a God who throws caution to the wind – relying on chance, or luck. Our God is one of mercy, grace, and peace – at the greatest expense! God is so intent on saving you – His vision is so locked in on you – that nothing else matters to Him than having you as His holy and choicest vines.

There is nothing – not height nor depth, nor present nor future, either angels or demons, or anything else in all creation that will keep God the Father from saving you – not even His one and only Son, whom He loves, will be spared.

You are the choicest vines in His vineyard as we heard from Isaiah – and having dedicated Himself to care for you and provide for all your needs – He comes looking for the fruit of repentance and faith.

The water pouring from the side of the crucified Christ has been poured out on you in Holy Baptism – cleansing you from all sin. The Holy Spirit breathes into you the breath of life – a life of faith, which respects the Giver of all good things, and rejoices to receive His gifts.

This is the cornerstone of your life – Jesus Christ – in whom you are an heir of God's kingdom – now, throughout this life, and even unto life everlasting. Amen.

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